

“I think myself as good as anybody”:

Nationalism, manliness, space and identity in Boswell’s *London Journal*

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Abstract

James Boswell (1740-1795), biographer of Samuel Johnson and lifelong diarist, provided one of the most detailed descriptions of eighteenth-century London life in his *London Journal: 1762-1763*. In it, Boswell chronicled his self-conscious attempts to refashion himself from the uncultivated Scottish youth that he worried he was into the refined London gentleman he desperately wanted to become. Moving to London at a time when Post-Union Britain was supposedly ushering in a new era of ‘Britishness’, Boswell’s musings offer a different perspective, one in which nationalism – specifically, English and Scottish nationalism – played an important role in Boswell’s quest to construct his idealized genteel identity. Examinations of Boswell’s *Journal* reveal important insight into his views on national identity, masculinity, and the city of London itself, as well as how all of these aspects relate to each other in shaping Boswell’s quest to shape his character.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
JAMES BOSWELL AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY IDENTITY	
CHAPTER ONE	15
“GOOD ENGLISHNESS” AND “BAD SCOTTISHNESS”: BOSWELL’S NATIONALISM	
CHAPTER TWO	40
“TO OBSERVE POLITENESS”: NATIONALISM AND BOSWELL’S MANLINESS	
CHAPTER THREE	60
“QUITE A PLACE TO MY MIND”: SPACE AND TOPOGRAPHY IN BOSWELL’S JOURNAL	
CONCLUSION	83
BIBLIOGRAPHY	86

Introduction: James Boswell and Eighteenth-Century Identity

James Boswell (1740-1795), the Ninth Laird of Auchinleck, was an Edinburgh-born lawyer, diarist, and biographer who was – at least until the discovery of his papers in the twentieth century – most well-known for his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, considered by many to be the greatest biography in the English language. Until his diaries, letters, and memoranda were unearthed at Malahide Castle in Ireland, and later at Fettercairn House, Scotland, Boswell was regarded largely as a self-centered, waffling, and womanizing buffoon who had, through an apparent (and limited) stroke of genius, managed to write such a seminal and ground-breaking bit of biography. This conception of Boswell stemmed almost entirely from Thomas Babington Macaulay's commentary from an 1831 review of a new edition of Boswell's *Life*, focusing on Boswell's sexual misadventures, alcoholism, and overall boorishness, which Peter Martin characterizes as “surely one of the most resounding pieces of *ad hominem* criticism that ever found its way into print.”¹ Boswell's descendents had also contributed to this reputation; treated as a “an ancestor to be defensive about, and therefore to be kept under cover”, his personal papers were kept hidden for generations, lending credence to Macaulay's assessment.²

Luckily, however, this all changed with the discovery of his papers,³ and Boswell became, as Martin describes, “the best example in the history of the English literature, perhaps in the literature of any nation, of how the discovery of personal papers after an author's death can radically change his reputation.”⁴ Thanks to the tireless efforts of Professor Frederick Pottle, Boswell became something of a household name (at least in

¹ Peter Martin, *A Life of James Boswell* (Great Britain: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 1-2.

² Christopher Morley, “Preface” in *Boswell's London Journal: 1762-1763*, edited by Frederick Pottle (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 1992), xviii.

³ The story of which can be found in David Buchanan, *The Treasure of Auchinleck* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974) and Frederick Pottle, *Pride and Negligence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980).

⁴ Martin, 3-4.

Britain); Boswell's *London Journal* in particular went on to sell over a million copies. As a result, Boswell's reputation has changed from that of an "accidental genius" to a much more complex and nuanced character. Boswell has proven to be acutely interested in self-examination, and his lifelong quest to discover and construct his identity grants valuable insight and makes him a valuable historical resource; as David Daiches writes, "We can thus look at history through Boswell or at Boswell through history. Whichever way we do it, Boswell acts as an illuminator."⁵ This is precisely the scope of this project: Boswell's intense self-examination creates a historical text in which questions of identity, masculinity, and space can be examined, granting insight into Boswell himself as well as the wider context of eighteenth-century Britain in which he attempted to invent himself. The focus lay with Boswell's *London Journal*, Boswell's first serious attempt at keeping a diary, and the beginning of his quest to discover and construct his identity.

On November 15, 1762, Boswell set off to London at the age of twenty-one. His father, Alexander Boswell, had been deeply concerned that his marriage contract promised the Auchinleck estate to James, his eldest son – whom Alexander felt was wholly irresponsible and whom he frequently threatened to disinherit.⁶ As such, he had promised James an allowance and leave to pursue his fortune in London in return for signing over his rights to estate to trustees of Alexander's choosing.⁷ James had been chafing under his father's expectations that he become a respectable Edinburgh lawyer, and craved independence; but most importantly, he wished to refashion himself into a

⁵ David. Daiches, "Boswell's Ambiguities." In *New Light on Boswell*. Greg Clingham, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2.

⁶ As he wrote to his son on 30 May 1763, "I say, even I by your strange conduct had come to the resolution of selling all off, from the principle that it is better to snuff a candle out than leave it to stink in a socket." Boswell, 341.

⁷ Gordon Turnbull, "Boswell, James (1740-1795)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edition, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2950>, accessed 16 Aug 2010]; Pottle, *London Journal*, 9-10.

respectable gentleman and construct an identity of his own choosing, very different from his father's ideas.⁸ James concocted a scheme to join the Footguards, writing to his friend, (and companion throughout his time in London) Andrew Erskine, that 'For military operation / I have a wondrous inclination,' and his overt quest throughout his time in London was to secure a commission in this regiment, and thus secure his independence.⁹

While Boswell's stated objective was to join the Footguards, for all of his posturing, his real desire was to secure a place for himself in London indefinitely; he confessed to Erskine that the real reason he desired the commission was "a city called London, for which I have as violent an affection, as the most romantic lover ever had for his mistress."¹⁰ As Pottle explains, securing a commission in the Footguards would have set Boswell up "with a gentlemanly profession that held the promise of keeping him in London with plenty of time to enjoy himself," for even in wartime, the Footguards – as the personal guard of the Sovereign – were unlikely to leave the city.¹¹ Boswell had no real desire to serve in the military; the Footguards were simply the "most eligible way of securing perpetual London residence."¹² Boswell's quest for a commission was, however, doomed from the outset; Boswell's arrival coincided with the ending of hostilities in the Seven Years' War, and rather than accepting new officers, the army was actively demobilizing – as such, it would have required Boswell to purchase the commission (his father, however, refused to give him the money), or to secure a generous act of patronage

⁸ Alexander wrote to his son: "You say that you was struggle for independency. What you mean by becoming independent I am at a loss to conceive, for it would seem to be something very different from what anybody else would aim at." Boswell, *London Journal*, 340.

⁹ James Boswell and Andrew Erskine, *Letters between the Honourable Andrew Erskine & James Boswell, Esq.* (London: Samuel Chandler, 1763), 92.

¹⁰ Martin, 88; Boswell & Erskine, 92.

¹¹ Pottle, *London Journal*, 19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 3-4.

on the part of a powerful benefactor. However, Boswell's father had made clear to all interested parties that this act of patronage would not be met with returned favours from Auchinleck, as he opposed the plan – Boswell “was defeated before he started.”¹³

While the military aspect of Boswell's project was doomed, it was never really his sincere priority – it was simply the best way Boswell had struck upon facilitating his main goal: a complete refashioning of his identity, which could only be affected (so Boswell believed) in the metropolis. Pottle identifies Lord Somerville as the inspiration for Boswell's quest and the importance of London; as an impoverished Scottish Lord, Somerville had joined the Footguards, married his way back into a fortune, and set himself up as a respected gentleman, achieving exactly the sort of success Boswell desired, and resulting in what Pottle describes as Boswell's “almost enthusiastic notion of the felicity of London” before he had even been there.¹⁴ Boswell feared that he was still, at his core, unrefined, immature, rattling, and boyish; but what he hoped to transform himself into was “a brilliant, high-bred man of pleasure, poised, courtly, imperturbable, holding scoffers in awe by the rapier of his wit”, and it was in London that he hoped to affect this transformation – thus began what Pottle calls “The campaign for making a new man out of James Boswell.”¹⁵

This “campaign” is where Boswell's *London Journal* came into the picture – this was a journal with a specific purpose, and that purpose was to chronicle as well as facilitate Boswell's transformation, first and foremost, in acting as a check on his behaviour and allowing him to judge his own character. Peter Martin identifies this as the main impetus behind the *Journal*, explaining that “if the writer knows he is going to write

¹³ Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁴ Ibid., 4.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15; Frederick Pottle, *James Boswell: The Earlier Years, 1740-1769* (London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 123.

about himself, he will make a point of trying to behave better. So the journal can be ‘useful’ as a kind of conscience or reckoning... The author can watch himself. He will be both the participant and the spectator.”¹⁶ Boswell, reflecting on his diaries in his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, observed that “And as a lady adjusts her dress before a mirror, a man adjusts his character by looking at his journal,”¹⁷ and the introduction he provides to his *London Journal* makes this purpose explicit:

The ancient philosopher certainly gave a wise counsel when he said, ‘Know thyself.’ For surely this knowledge is of all the most important... A man cannot know himself better than by attending to the feelings of his heart and to his external actions, from which he may with tolerable certainty judge ‘what manner of person he is.’ I have therefore determined to keep a daily journal in which I shall set down my various sentiments and my various conduct, which will be not only useful but very agreeable. It will give me a habit of application and improve me in expression; and knowing that I am to record my transactions will make me more careful to do well. Or if I should go wrong, it will assist me in resolutions of doing better.¹⁸

It is clear that, along with other benefits, Boswell felt that his *Journal* helped him to moderate his behaviour and judge his progress throughout his time in London.

Boswell’s *Journal* served another important purpose; it was here that Boswell mused upon questions of identity and attempted to understand himself – examining his motives, his moods, and desires – toward the end of refashioning himself into the man he wished to be. Donald J. Newman and Patricia Spacks identify this task as the source of the *Journal*’s strength, Newman explaining that “He relied on his journal to resolve a painful identity crisis... no other journal was ever given a personal task similar to this

¹⁶ Martin, 111.

¹⁷ James Boswell, *Boswell’s Life of Johnson, including Boswell’s Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson’s Diary of a Journey into North Wales*, Volume III. Edited by George Birbeck Hill. (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1887), 228.

¹⁸ Pottle in Boswell, *London Journal*, 39.

one,”¹⁹ and Spacks similarly writes that “By studying his journal he discovers and partly controls who he is... Boswell’s record achieves its intensity by its commitment to infinite personal possibility.”²⁰ As Felicity A. Nussbaum discusses, Boswell’s *Journal* is prototypical of eighteenth-century journals in general, as they offered a private space for experimentation and revision in regards to one’s identity; a place for mediating the conflicts of “self”.²¹ Boswell did not write his *Journal* to explain or defend himself to the world; he wrote “to explain himself to himself,” and this resulted in a “seemingly endless stream of meditation” on the topic.²² It is in the *Journal* that Boswell grappled with questions of identity and, in doing so, sought to construct and understand his own; keeping his *Journal* allowed Boswell to reflect upon his quest to refashion himself, and as Spacks writes, “To record a life helps to create it” – as such, it is in Boswell’s *Journal* that he invents himself.²³

According to Spacks, autobiographical texts, especially in the eighteenth century, must be approached carefully, as “all suggest some attempt to invent a valid identity for defensive purposes.”²⁴ Spacks, along with most others, however, locate Boswell outside of the realm of typical eighteenth-century autobiography and consider his works on the

¹⁹ Donald J. Newman, “A Petty Trifle: Art and Identity in Boswell’s London Journal.” *Prose Studies*, 25:2 (2002): 45.

²⁰ Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), 228.

²¹ Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), xxi.

²² Spacks, 16. Spacks continues: “The journals embody an endless struggle to make sense out of his life, a struggle of interpretation in which one form of self-understanding gives way to another in a conflict-ridden sequence that creates drama from the act of writing. If novelists like Richardson and Fielding assert the stability of identity, Boswell insists on the converse. Identity, he suggests, is made.” See Spacks, 16; Martin, 111.

²³ Spacks, 230.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15; Nussbaum disagrees with this assessment, claiming that a core aspect of eighteenth-century autobiography “rests on the assumption that its [the self’s] truth can be told”, and that journals were written privately to “escape preexisting categories, to tell the ‘truth’ of experience.” See Nussbaum, xv, 28. If this argument is accepted, then there is no necessity to justify the sincerity and veracity of Boswell’s diaries; however, since scholars such as Spacks and Newman characterise eighteenth-century autobiographies quite differently, it is necessary to explicate Boswell’s truthfulness as done below.

whole to be trustworthy – his *Journal* is not hampered by the self-serving justifications (read: falsifications) and defensiveness of other works: “Writing journals rather than formal retrospection, he... demonstrates no paramount need to defend against the opinion of others.”²⁵ Newman concurs, noting that when Boswell *was* attempting to posture for wide audiences, he wrote “facetious works... intended to gain admirers by dazzling them with his wit and extravagance,” while his *London Journal* was intended to affirm his identity to himself.²⁶ Martin agrees, noting that the works Boswell published around this time consist of little more than “rollicking wit and pretentious prattle [which] conceals rather than reveals.”²⁷

Spacks chalks this up to a difference in audience: while most eighteenth-century autobiography was concerned with presenting a certain image to the world, Boswell “felt himself to be his most significant audience.”²⁸ While Boswell wrote the *Journal* to his (second-closest, after William Temple, by Boswell’s reckoning) friend from his college days, John Johnston of Grange, in order to ease his melancholy, it is clear throughout his *Journal* that, as Spacks asserts, Boswell’s most important reader was himself – he states at the outset that his intended audience is himself, later in life:

In this way I shall preserve many things that would otherwise be lost to oblivion... and I shall lay up a store of entertainment for my after life. Very often we have more pleasure in reflecting on agreeable scenes that we have been in than we had from the scenes themselves. I shall regularly record the business or rather the pleasure of every day. I shall not study much correctness, lest the labour of it should make me lay it aside altogether. I hope it will be of use to my worthy friend, Johnston.²⁹

²⁵ Spacks, 16.

²⁶ Newman, 45.

²⁷ Martin, 92-93.

²⁸ Spacks, 232.

²⁹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 40.

It is also worth noting that while Boswell was also writing the *Journal* for practice (he aspired to become, and ultimately achieved fame as, a writer), he made sure to point out that this was not the main purpose, and he would not let “observing too much correctness” spoil the project. Likewise, he lauded his *Journal* (and the act of journaling in general) after a discussion with Samuel Johnson:

He advised me to keep a journal of my life, fair and undisguised. He said it would be a very good exercise, and would yield me infinite satisfaction when the ideas were faded from my remembrance. I told him that I had done so ever since I left Scotland. He said he was very happy that I pursued so good a plan. And now, O my journal! Art thou not highly dignified? Shalt thou not flourish tenfold?³⁰

Again, it was made clear in Boswell’s writings that while he was sending his *Journal* to Johnston, his main audience remained himself – hence the lack of defensive posturing and superficiality that plagues eighteenth-century autobiography.³¹

While Spacks points to the limited audience as facilitating the sincerity of Boswell’s *Journal*, Peter Martin, Boswell’s most recent biographer, argues that an unerring commitment to honesty in Boswell’s character is what makes the text trustworthy. Boswell would explain this as a defining aspect of his character in the autobiographical sketch he famously provided for Jean-Jacques Rousseau at age 24:

I do not recollect having had any other valuable principle impressed upon me by my father except a strict regard for the truth, which he impressed upon my mind by a hearty beating at an early age when I lied, and then talking of the *dishonour* of lying. I recollect distinctly having truth and honour thus indelibly inculcated upon me by him one evening in our house.³²

Martin accepts Boswell’s assessment, and finds much supporting evidence in his childhood, noting that it was not just his father, but his mother, who instilled honesty in

³⁰ Ibid., 305. (16 July)

³¹ Spacks, 24.

³² Boswell’s “Sketch”, in Pottle, *The Earlier Years*, 1.

Boswell at a young age.³³ Martin also notes that while the *Journal* was addressed to Grange, this did not impact the sincerity of the endeavour: “Despite the strong confessional strain, which is honest and sincere, Boswell wanted the journal to entertain. It can still be trusted, though, as an autobiographical record. His imagination adapts and transforms, but it does not lie or misrepresent.”³⁴ Boswell made similar assertions in his *Journal*,³⁵ but more significantly, he stressed his work’s candour (perhaps to his detriment) in his accompanying letters to Grange, and asks for guidance:

I would particularly beg your advice about the quantity of Journal I should write a week and whether you think I follow a right method. Tell me too when I inadvertently insert things that ought not to be written. My Journal is a most candid history. You will there see that I am apt to waver about plans of life when I see the difficulties of getting into the Guards.³⁶

Boswell’s candour and sincerity make sense in the context of his (very) limited audience and his commitment to the truth, and both of these aspects of his *Journal* were reinforced, again and again in Boswell’s letters to Grange, by Boswell’s fear of their discovery and his insistence that Grange keep them private. Boswell implored Grange to let none see his *Journal*: “Now to the subject of my Journal again. I must insist that no Mortal see a word of it. You need not mention it, at all. You may tell any storys or anecdotes you think can entertain from it, and just say you had them from your friend Mr.

³³ Writes Martin: “Paradoxically, here a secular insistence on the truth mingled with memories of cold discipline and fear. If his mother was a warm saint who none the less encouraged in him morbid fears of hell and damnation, his father’s coldness and severity ingrained in him candour and accuracy, or to put it negatively, a fear of lying. Boswell’s truthfulness as a biographer and autobiographer would bring him fame at home and across Europe, but his father’s legacy was not without a codicil of gall.” See Martin, 25.

³⁴ Martin, 114.

³⁵ Writes Boswell: “I was observing to my friend Erskine that a plan of this kind was dangerous, as a man might in the openness of his heart say many things and discover many facts that might do him great harm if the journal should fall into the hands of my enemies. Against which there is no perfect security... I shall be upon my guard to mention nothing that can do harm. Truth shall ever be observed, and these things (if there should be any such) that require the gloss of falsehood shall be passed by in silence. At the same time I may relate things under borrowed names with safety that would do much mischief if particularly known.” See Boswell, *London Journal*, 39-40.

³⁶ Boswell to Johnston, March 1, 1763, in *The Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnston of Grange*, edited by Ralph S. Walker. (Toronto: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1966), 54.

Boswell, at London.”³⁷ Grange had to reassure Boswell that his papers were placed in a locked strongbox as soon as he received them, but still counselled Boswell that while he had no reason to fear Grange breaching his trust, any number of things could happen that would put them into other hands.³⁸ As Martin explains, Boswell was anxiously aware of the compromising position he was putting himself,³⁹ and his worst fears were indeed realized when Grange revealed that Boswell’s packets had been arriving to him already opened, leaving Boswell “shocked” and “exceedingly pained,” by what he saw as a horrific breach of his privacy.⁴⁰ Boswell had been so earnest in his *Journal* because he believed, and assumed it to be, for his and Grange’s eyes only; learning that this was not the case upset him greatly.

Returning to the purpose of Boswell’s *Journal* – attempting to resolve a personal identity crisis – it is also important to understand the context in which Boswell was so determinedly seeking, refashioning, and constructing his own identity. Christopher Fox points to Locke’s 1690 *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as being of seminal importance in establishing a new approach to identity in the eighteenth century, one which proved particularly influential on Boswell’s approach. Locke introduced a new concept, ‘Identity of consciousness’, which seemed to assert that the “self” was not in any

³⁷ Boswell to Johnston, December 21, 1762, in Boswell & Johnston, 33.

³⁸ Johnston to Boswell, December 13, 1762: “As you justly observe, there can be no absolute certainty of one’s most private papers not falling into the hands of those who would make a bad use of them. Tho’ I have no Suspicion of your Diffidence in me, nor while I live shall you have any cause for it, Yet who can be Surety, against the many unfortunate accidents that happen.” See Boswell & Johnston, 29.

³⁹ Martin, 115.

⁴⁰ Nussbaum identifies the fear of his father discovering his journal as one of his greatest concerns; see Nussbaum, 109-110 Boswell to Johnston, March 22, 1763: “The unhappy fact which you have disclosed to me of my packets having been broke open, shocked me a good deal. However it was right to inform me of it. I would willingly impute all that my parents do, to a real tho’ mistaken concern about me: But really this was to very ungenteel and really so very hard that it pains me exceedingly. It was doing what no Parent has a right to do, In the case of a Son who is a Man, and therefore an independent Individual.” See Boswell & Johnston, 59.

way permanent, but instead ever-changing.⁴¹ Ernest Tuveson writes that as a result of Locke's assertions, personalities became "shifting things" that did not exist essentially throughout a lifetime, or even hour to hour.⁴² Roy Porter agrees, noting that the new Lockean paradigm "awakened a bold vision of man making himself", and led to the emergence of the model of "self-made man".⁴³ Dror Wahrman also notes that the Lockean "assumption of humans as malleable beings" was also becoming growing in popularity throughout the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ David Hume, Boswell's contemporary (who reprimanded Boswell in a letter during the *Journal*) had reached a similar (albeit, even to himself, unsatisfactory) conclusion regarding identity in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, essentially denying the existence of identity at all: "But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement."⁴⁵ As Porter points out, this all-encompassing uncertainty drove Hume to a nervous breakdown, faced as he was with the unstable and inconsistent nature of one's identity.⁴⁶ This is a wide-ranging philosophical discussion that cannot be done justice to in a brief summation, and goes

⁴¹ Christopher Fox, *Locke and the Scribblers: Identity and Consciousness in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 17; For Locke's discussion of identity and consciousness, see *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, pp. 217-231.

⁴² Ernest Lee Tuveson, *The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the aesthetics of Romanticism*. (California: University of California Press, 1960), 27-29.

⁴³ Roy Porter, *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1997), 4-5.

⁴⁴ Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 186.

⁴⁵ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. L.A. Selby-Bigge, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 252-253.

⁴⁶ As Porter writes: "Again: working within the Lockean tradition, Augustan satirists and philosophers like David Hume were... deeply troubled by the possibility that the individual was nothing more than an unstable heap of impressions. Under such circumstances, what guarantee was there that the same person would wake up as the one who went to sleep the night before? (Perhaps only that false friend, memory.) It is surely no accident that the sceptical philosopher David Hume himself suffered what we would today call a nervous breakdown..." See Porter, 9.

beyond the scope of this project, but Wahrman succinctly summarizes the eighteenth-century approach to identity that would influence Boswell during his writing of the *Journal*; it was a framework defined by “malleability: the sense that one’s ‘personal identity’ ...at least in principle or under certain circumstances, could be imagined as unfixed and potentially changeable – sometimes perceived as double, other times as sheddable, replaceable, or moldable.”⁴⁷

Boswell, as Fox points out, “appears almost intuitively to embrace the self-in-consciousness” that was gaining credence in the eighteenth century, and this is borne out in his *Journal*.⁴⁸ Wahrman writes that while, to modern sensibilities, the idea that one can simply change one’s essential identity and character seems odd, Boswell – like other eighteenth-century writers – based his belief on the “more mutable” eighteenth-century sense of identity, which made the changing of identities seem “possible, and to some even plausible... a non-essential notion of identity that was not anchored in a deeply seated self.”⁴⁹ When Boswell commented as early as November 21 that “we may be in some degree whatever character we choose,”⁵⁰ Wahrman insists that he meant this with a literalness that was possible in the eighteenth-century framework of identity.⁵¹ This is important to remember in approach the *Journal* – Boswell’s entire endeavour was

⁴⁷ Wahrman, 169. Nussbaum disagrees with these assessments, a dissenting voice in regards to Boswell’s *Journal*. She insists, specifically refuting Spack’s view on Boswell’s constructed identity, arguing that he was seeking out an “essential truth” rather than the “self-as-construct”, and Nussbaum identifies the real conflict to be between Boswell’s changeable, public self and his static, private self, the reconciliation of which would lead to the “truth” of Boswell’s character. See Nussbaum, 7-8, 103. This is a reading of the *Journal* at odds with the aforementioned scholarship on the topic, and this project seeks to illustrate that Boswell’s project of self-fashioning relied heavily on his belief in the supreme mutability of his identity.

⁴⁸ Fox, 127.

⁴⁹ Wahrman, 176.

⁵⁰ Boswell, *London Journal*, 47. (21 November)

⁵¹ Wahrman, 174-175; Wahrman argues this point further, writing: “To be sure, people in every generation can be found to make such pronouncements. But in the short eighteenth century they may well have *meant* them in a different and more literal way... all of them signalled a sense of malleability of identity that is far from our own when we say – to borrow a refrain from a 1970s musical – ‘we could have been anything that we wanted to be.’” See Wahrman, 170.

predicated on his assumption that he *could* indeed change his personality and adopt the new identity he so desired, leaving his youthful character behind. But as Fox points out, this approach to identity also caused difficulties: “Boswell’s preoccupation with the self-in-consciousness makes his attempt to locate a ‘real’ character – one that ‘was’ there all the time – an even more difficult task,”⁵² and even when Boswell had moments of success and wished to fix himself in whichever particular character he had achieved, it always proved fleeting; his quest to refashion his identity could never truly be resolved, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

It is with these ideas regarding identity that Boswell embarked upon “the campaign for making a new man out of James Boswell” and took off to London to refashion himself into the refined gentleman he wished to become. It was also this eighteenth-century framework of identity that allowed Boswell to set forth– and assert the success of – his project almost immediately, writing after only a week in London that:

Since I came up, I have begun to acquire a composed genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one which for some time past I have been fond of. I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever character we choose. Besides, practice forms a man to anything. I was now happy to find myself cool, easy, and serene.⁵³

He would restate his success in having adopted a more erudite character again, less than a month later:

I feel a surprising change to the better on myself since I came to London. I am an independent man. I think myself as good as anybody, and I act entirely on my own principles. Formerly I was directed by others. I took every man’s advice, that I regarded; I was fond to have it. I asked it. I told all my story freely. But now I keep my own counsel, I follow the dictates of my own good sense, than which I can see no better monitor, and I proceed consistently and resolutely.⁵⁴

⁵² Fox, 128.

⁵³ Boswell, *London Journal*, 47. (21 November)

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 82. (13 December)

For Boswell – at least initially – London had exactly the effect that he had been hoping for on his identity; the campaign was a success right out of the gate. However, as mentioned, Boswell’s belief in a mutable identity also proved to be his downfall, and he would frequently struggle in his quest to maintain the sort of identity he so desperately desired (Newman characterizes the entirety of the *Journal* as “a depressing record of failures”⁵⁵). In his attempt to refashion his identity from the rattling, uncouth character of his childhood into a refined London gentleman, Boswell attempted to ease this troubled transition into manhood by adopting specific paradigms that seemed to provide simple prescriptions for success, paradigms predicated on nationalism, manly politeness, and space all toward the end of affecting his transformation into the independent gentleman he had set out for London to become.

⁵⁵ Newman, 39.

Chapter 1: “Good Englishness” and “Bad Scottishness”: Boswell’s Nationalism

The most integral part of Boswell’s identity, in his opinion, and thus the aspect most requiring refashioning, was his national identity. Scottishness was diagnosed as a problem, and Englishness was prescribed as the cure. Throughout his time in London, Boswell latched onto this simplistic, nationalist dichotomy as his primary paradigm in refashioning himself. This had profound impacts on his musings, actions, and social behaviour. However, an underlying emotional commitment to his homeland kept him from achieving Englishness, thereby contributing to his near-incessant musings on the nature of nationalism and its impact on his, and others’, identities, and his repeated attempts to distance himself from his countrymen and become more English.

An important distinction that must be made at the outset is the difference between nationalism as national *sentiment* or *identity* and nationalism as an *ideological movement*,⁵⁶ as this project deals only with the former. While nationalism as a movement is a modern phenomenon constructed in the wake of the French Revolution, national identities and sentiments can be traced back much further, with a number of historians arguing that national sentiment can be traced as far back as the sixteenth century,⁵⁷ and, as Adrian Hastings asserts, can be seen in Britain as far back as the late medieval period.⁵⁸ While Hastings and other scholars argue against interpretations of nationalism (and in this case, specifically against Benedict Anderson⁵⁹) that portray it as a recent and rationally-constructed popular movement, and modernist scholars reject any discussions

⁵⁶ For a broader discussion of this distinction, see Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 1; Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 188.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 170-171; Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 27-88.

⁵⁸ Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 35-65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

of nationalism before the late eighteenth century,⁶⁰ the real issue appears to be not one of chronology, but rather one of definition. Examinations of nationalism as an ideological movement are indeed anachronistic before 1789, but dismissing feelings and identities centering on national ties before this date is contrary to the evidence.⁶¹ As will be seen in Boswell's *London Journal*, while nationalism as a political force may not have existed,⁶² strong feelings of national identity were indeed pervasive; for Boswell, nationalism was the most important aspect of his – and others' – identity, character, and conduct.

The historiography relating to national identity in eighteenth-century Britain is dominated by Linda Colley's seminal *Britons: Forging the Nation*, and it is, as such, necessary to discuss how Boswell's own nationalist project relates to her narrative. Essentially, Boswell's *London Journal* contradicts Colley's thesis. Colley's argument is that in this post-Union period, a new national identity – British – was emerging on the Island, and was, in many important ways, overcoming “English”, “Scottish”, and “Welsh” identities. This identity emerged, Colley argues, in response to an overtly hostile Other – an “us and them” mentality forged through near constant conflict with the Catholic French throughout the eighteenth century, and was characterized by a shared

⁶⁰ These scholars have collectively come to be known as “functionalists”, or, sometimes, “situationalists”; for a detailed discussion of this viewpoint – which is perhaps the most dominant school of thought in nationalist studies – see Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2001), 49; also Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 157; David Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 5, 15.

⁶¹ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 171.

⁶² As well, even if nationalism as an ideology did exist at this time, examining it as such would serve little purpose in relation to individuals like Boswell, as this approach necessitates a world-historical viewpoint (often characterized as taking place at an ‘olympian distance’) that can explain how nationalism impacts *people*, but cannot do so for a *person*. See Rogers Brubaker, “Myths and misconceptions in the study of nationalism,” in *The State of the Nation*, edited by John A. Hall (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 273. Anthony Smith concurs, writing: “Not only have individuals and their choices become irrelevant, group actors and their strategies have become at best the products of the interplay of ‘structure’ and ‘culture’, their movements preordained in the drama of the transition from ‘low’ to ‘high’ cultures.” See Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 35.

Protestantism that overcame other divisors.⁶³ As well, Colley points to regional attachments to villages, towns and families as superseding national affiliations,⁶⁴ and that the citizens were largely unconscious of their own “nations” as distinct from one another.⁶⁵ However, the eighteenth-century Britain that Colley describes – regardless of its dominance of the historiography – is conspicuously absent in Boswell’s writings, with the *Journal* painting a very different picture of nationalism in this time and place. Colley’s assessment of nationalism is convincing when applied to *people*, but, like so many surveys, is less convincing when applied to a *person*. The nature of British identity as Colley describes it – Protestant, anti-French, and without clearly-defined divisors by region – is simply not present in Boswell’s ideas of nationalism in his *London Journal*.

Colley asserts that regional attachments were the most cogent self-identifiers in the eighteenth century,⁶⁶ and this phenomenon was compounded by the fact that:

[A]ttachment to Wales, to Scotland and even to England was always complicated by the fact that these three countries were neither united in themselves nor distinct from each other... In terms of language, religion, levels of literacy, social organisation and ethnicity, Scottish Lowlanders had far more in common with the inhabitants of northern England than they did with their own Highland countrymen.⁶⁷

As such, it is clear that in Colley’s assessment, hard-line self-identifiers like “English” or “Scottish” would lack currency; in her narrative, identities seem to shift from regional

⁶³ Colley’s detailed discussion of Britishness at this time can be found in Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. 2nd Edition. (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2005), 1-54.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁶ Colley writes: “Great Britain in 1707 was much less a trinity of three self-contained and self-conscious nations than a patchwork in which uncertain areas of Welshness, Scottishness, and Englishness were cut across by strong regional attachments, and scored over again by loyalties to village, town, family and landscape. In other words, like virtually every other part of Europe in this period, Great Britain was infinitely diverse in terms of the customs and cultures of its inhabitants.” See Colley, 17. Finlay also agrees with this particular assessment; see Richard Finlay, “Caledonia or North Britain? Scottish Identity in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Image and Identity: The Making and Re-Making of Scotland Through the Ages*. Dauvit Broun, R.J. Finlay, and Michael Lynch eds. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1998), 144.

⁶⁷ Colley, 14.

attachments to the “British” identity she is explaining. This arc is not, however, borne out in Boswell’s *Journal*. For Boswell, Englishness and Scottishness were the most – if not the *only* – important identifiers (as will be demonstrated below), and in a journal in which Boswell considered nationalism to some degree in almost more entries than he did not, considerations of anything “British” simply never appear. “English” and “Scottish”, however, were used to identify and describe not only Boswell himself, but everyone he interacted with throughout his *Journal*.⁶⁸ There was no regionalism in Boswell’s worldview that precluded any meaningful understanding of “English” or “Scottish”; he did not, for example, consider his own identity primarily in relation to the Auchinleck estate or the city of Edinburgh as one would expect from Colley’s analysis, and likewise, he did not consider any such attachments when judging those around him; as will be seen in the discussion of the incident at Covent Garden Theatre below, Boswell had no problem identifying with Highlanders by virtue of their shared Scottishness. For Boswell, the two important aspects of his national identity were explicitly Englishness and Scottishness; Colley’s narrative is simply not borne out in his experience.

The disconnect between Boswell’s experiences and Colley’s framework is less a case of Boswell being a unique exception to the rule (in fact, Boswell is often looked to as a – if not *the* – primary exemplar in discussions of English and Scottish national identity at this time⁶⁹), and what seems to be a case of anachronism in Colley’s work regarding a “British” identity at this specific time. Langlands and Langford have pointed

⁶⁸ Except for the Turks that he meets on July 18 – and even then, Boswell makes sure to record that they compliment him on his English character. See Boswell, *London Journal*, 307-308.

⁶⁹ Colley herself makes a passing reference to Boswell, but cannot seem to account for him. See Colley, 124-125; other examples of Boswell being mentioned in this capacity can be found in G.H. Murray Pittock, *The Invention of Scotland* (London: Routledge, 1991), 64; William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 227; Keith Robbins, *Great Britain: Identities, Institutions, and the Idea of Britishness* (New York: Longman, 1998), 268.

out this anachronism in Colley's work, with Langlands arguing that Colley's "British" themes would have been viewed by eighteenth-century contemporaries as simply English,

⁷⁰ and Langford concurs, stating that:

It is difficult to discover any alleged British characteristic that does not in practice coincide with an alleged English characteristic. Nor is it easy to find any supposed characteristic of one of the so-called Celtic nations that was not specifically contrasted with an English characteristic.⁷¹

Richard Finlay agrees with this assessment, stating that conceptions of Britishness at this time were "little more than an academic exercise", and there was no "homogenous sense of British identity."⁷² Boswell's considerations of national identity seem to validate this criticism. Even as someone who grappled on a daily basis with issues of nationalism in post-Union Britain, there was absolutely no consideration of Britishness; there was only Englishness and (a negatively-defined) Scottishness.

Another aspect of Colley's Britishness unrepresented in Boswell's *Journal* is her assertion that a century of repeated wars against the French "Other" were the driving force behind a British identity: "It was an invention forged above all by war. Time and time again, war with France brought Britons, whether they hailed from Wales or Scotland or England, into confrontation with an obviously hostile Other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it."⁷³ While Colley asserts that this is an important catalyst in the formation of national identity at this time, it is not only absent from Boswell's *Journal* – and this is during, and at the conclusion of, the Seven Years' War,

⁷⁰ Rebecca Langlands, "Britishness or Englishness? The historical problem of national identity in Britain." *Nations and Nationalism*, 5:1 (1999), 57.

⁷¹ Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14. Langford goes further, pointing to contemporary dictionaries to further stress the anachronism of an explicitly British identity, writing: "Indeed Britishness as an expression had to wait until the late nineteenth century, if the dictionaries are to be believed. And to be un-British was unexpressed until later still. But un-English was a term in use from at least the late seventeenth century." See Langford, 13.

⁷² Finlay, 152.

⁷³ Colley, 5; For Colley's detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Colley, 1-6.

the largest conflict between Britain and France that had ever been seen – but which was also explicitly refuted by Boswell when he discussed the war with his friend, Captain Andrew Erskine. Boswell wrote, contrary to Colley's narrative, that his national sentiments were not swayed by war:

I cannot help it. I see too far into the system of things to be much in earnest. I consider mankind in general, and therefore cannot take a part in their quarrels when divided into particular states and nations. I can see that after a war is over and a great quantity of cold and hunger and want of sleep and torment endured by mortals, things are upon the whole just as they were.⁷⁴

For Boswell, war was seen as a pointless exercise, as he focused too much on the suffering endured by both sides to be swept up in nationalist fervour.

Whether Boswell was simply *too* in touch with humanity as a whole, as he asserted, or whether he was simply apathetic about war and attempting to cast this in a more flattering light (he had prefaced this discussion with the admission that he and Erskine tended not to care about things that did not affect them directly⁷⁵), the result is still the same: war did nothing to stir Boswell's national sentiments. The ending of the conflict with the Peace only interested Boswell insofar as it allowed him to show off his skills at analogy when conversing at Child's – it did not bolster his national pride.⁷⁶ While Colley insists that the fact that British citizens never faced massive casualties or destruction of their homeland made them *more* chauvinistic and focused on the nationalist aspects of war,⁷⁷ Boswell, at least, had the opposite experience; not having to deal with the war in any tangible way rendered it largely meaningless in his quest for

⁷⁴ Boswell, *London Journal*, 77. (11 December)

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 75. (11 December)

⁷⁷ Colley, 3.

identity. The British may have won the war, but this did not create any cogent British identity in Boswell's mind that supplanted Englishness or Scottishness.

Colley's assertion that British national identities hinged on an opposition to the French "Other" also cannot be found in Boswell's *London Journal*. In fact, the only times that Boswell commented on the French, he was comparing them favourably with the melancholy English,⁷⁸ or resolving to "better himself" through the reading and speaking of the language with his then-paramour Louisa.⁷⁹ In fact, in Boswell's correspondences with Erskine – which he published while in London – his only explicit consideration of the French influence on his identity is:

You see I retain my usual volatility. The Boswells, you know, came over from Normandy, with William the Conqueror, and some of us posses the spirit of our ancestors the French. I do for one. A pleasant spirit it is.⁸⁰

For Boswell, the French influenced his character only through their ancestry, not through any "British" solidarity spurred by repeated wars; and this impact is something Boswell considered positive, not negative.⁸¹

Again, this is not so much a case of Boswell being a singular anomaly, but rather an apparent case of a very different "Other" being on the minds of Londoners in the 1760s: the Scots. While Colley does mention the "runaway" Scottophobia rampant in

⁷⁸ Writes Boswell: "O they are the people who enjoy time; so lively, pleasant, and gay. You never hear of madness or self-murder among them. Heat of fancy evaporates in fine brisk clear vapour with them, but amongst the English often falls heavy upon the brain." See Boswell, Boswell, *London Journal*, 88. (16 December).

⁷⁹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 137. (12 January)

⁸⁰ Boswell & Erskine, 4.

⁸¹ King disagrees on the importance of sexuality in Boswell's identity, but still points to this incident as another instance of Boswell emulating idealized Englishmen. Writes King: "Boswell pictured himself the morning after 'as one of the wits in King Charles the Second's time.' Boswell's pleasures proliferated in and through textuality, his pursuit of Louisa imitating the popular accounts, preserved in the theatrical histories and biographies, celebrating Charles II and the wits Charles Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, and John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester, as seducers and keepers of such actresses as Eleanor Gym and Elizabeth Barry." See Thomas Alan King, *The Gendering of Men, 1600-1750* (United States: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 309.

London after 1760,⁸² her treatment of the issue characterizes it, as Finlay points out, as “Little more than base prejudice, flamed by rabble rousers and spiced with a hint of jealousy. In short, it was little more than a minor teething problem associated with the expansion of the British state.”⁸³ But this was not the case; as Finlay argues, this was a much more serious problem,⁸⁴ especially in the early 1760s. Like Finlay, Ferguson asserts that since the beginning of the prime ministership of John Stuart, third earl of Bute – a Scot – a “hysterical outburst” of Scottophobia had been facing London, fuelled by agitators like John Wilkes.⁸⁵ Wilkes was, at the time, cultivating a cult of England possessed of a “virulent hatred” of the Scots, predicated on what Matthew McCormack describes as popular prejudices that Scots were “clannish, dependent... and poor”, juxtaposed with “the ideal of the independent man”, characterized as a politically-active, freeborn English male, constructing Scots as the “other” to Wilkes’ ideal Englishman.⁸⁶ The argument for a more cogent Scottish than French “other” is borne out by Boswell’s experiences in London; as will be demonstrated below, Boswell was acutely sensitive of how others would react to his Scottishness, and, as Ferguson argues, buys into this anti-Scottishness himself, his harsh opinions of the Scots and high opinions of the English earning him the epithets of “wretched Scotch cringer” and a “brilliant and erratic crawler” even in Ferguson’s modern work.⁸⁷ In London in the 1760s, there was less of a construction of a “British” identity in opposition to the French, and more of a consolidation of English identity in opposition to the Scottish; and this larger pattern was writ small in Boswell’s own quest for national identity throughout his time in London.

⁸² Colley, 117.

⁸³ Finlay, 148.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ferguson, 228.

⁸⁶ Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 82, 84.

⁸⁷ Ferguson, 227.

As Boswell fits poorly into the dominant (but, as illustrated, contested) historiographical framework, a different approach will be utilized in examining the role nationalism plays in Boswell's quest to refashion himself. Two approaches to national identity will be employed as explanatory tools; primordialism and constructivism. Primordialism is less a theory than it is a single, powerful assertion that national identity is a timeless and natural aspect of what it means to be human, stemming from the primordialist insistence that nations have existed "since time immemorial."⁸⁸ Nations are seen as "natural" and "organic", and this is the source of the innate and powerful pull nationalism has on an individual's attachments and self-definition – culminating in an overwhelming emotional bond to one's national community that cannot be denied.⁸⁹ As such, in primordialist frameworks, national identity is necessarily "logically and emotionally prior to any other forms of identity," which explains the pre-eminent role nationalism plays in identity.⁹⁰ This argument – in which national identity is given by nature – implies that national attachments are "fixed" or "static", and as Umut Özkirimli explains, this means that these sentiments "are transmitted from one generation to the next with their 'essential' characteristics unchanged... what we witness today is merely a reassertion of the national essence" from times immemorial.⁹¹ And although he is mostly skeptical of this approach, scholars such as Anthony Smith and Robin Cohen admit that primordialist thought is useful insofar as it brings to light the sheer emotional power of nationalism, and draws scholars' attention to the existence of a "powerful popular primordialism",⁹² which Smith defines as "the participants' vivid sense of the primordial

⁸⁸ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 64.

⁸⁹ Brown, 6.

⁹⁰ Robin Cohen, "The Making of Ethnicity: A Modest Defence of Primordialism," in *People, Nation & State*, edited by Edward Mortimer and Robert Fine. (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 4.

⁹¹ Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism*, 75.

⁹² Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 158-159; Cohen, 5.

nature of their own collective cultural identities,”⁹³ in the everyday lives and beliefs of individuals.

This popular primordialism manifests itself repeatedly throughout Boswell’s *Journal*, especially in regards to an intrinsic “national character” that Boswell and those around him believe shape (or even determine) one’s identity. While it would be anachronistic to think that Boswell (or those he encounters in his *Journal*) would have been articulating things in these modern, specific, and self-conscious terms, even a perfunctory examination of Boswell’s time in London reveals that the worldviews of those involved were undoubtedly primarily primordialist in nature. While it may be, in modern times, uncomfortable to hear the assertion that national origin has any organic or determining influence on one’s character or identity, as Paul Langford warns, this discomfort should “not be permitted to blind us to the prominence that the concept of national character has played in the past.”⁹⁴ While the theoretical framework of primordialism has only been explicitly articulated in the last century, it was nonetheless the dominant worldview of Boswell and his contemporaries, and these unconscious primordialist beliefs shaped Boswell’s nationalist project and musings throughout the *Journal*.

The second explanatory framework that will be employed in examining Boswell’s *Journal* is constructivism, most succinctly summarized by one of its main proponents, David Brown:

Constructivist approaches suggest that national identity is constructed on the basis of institutional or ideological frameworks which offer simple and indeed simplistic formulas of identity, and diagnoses of contemporary problems, to otherwise confused or insecure individuals. The

⁹³ Smith, *Nationalism*, 53.

⁹⁴ Langford, 7.

constructivist answer begins by denying that nations are real substantive entities, and suggesting that the perception by those involved that they *are* real should be understood as a form of ideological consciousness which filters reality, rather than reflects it.⁹⁵

It is also important to note that in constructivist frameworks, the function of nationalism is to provide individuals with a sense of identity – but this sense of identity may “be neither rationally chosen nor innately given, but constructed largely unconsciously or intuitively as a category of understanding.”⁹⁶ To constructivists, nationalism is not an innate aspect of one’s character; it is a paradigm, and one of the most important aspects of an individual’s worldview.

This “category of understanding” or worldview necessarily recognizes the importance of historical precedent, while still acknowledging the creative aspect of nationalism.⁹⁷ This is one of the most important aspects of this theoretical framework; while the past places constraints on the present, there is still an acknowledgement of the constant reinterpretation, based on external feedback, which goes on in the construction of one’s national identity.⁹⁸ National identities are not, as David Brown explains, “freely or consciously chosen, nor are they constructed in isolation”⁹⁹ – nationalism is often taken for granted as seemingly organic parts of one’s identity (as in primordialism), but this is only so when one’s national identity is acknowledged and validated by others. To continue with Brown’s explanation, “When we interact with others for whom our identity

⁹⁵ Brown, 20.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁷ John Armstrong, “Towards a Theory of Nationalism: Consensus and Dissensus,” in *Notions of Nationalism*, edited by Sukumar Periwal (New York: Central European University Press, 1995), 40; Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Place, kinship and the case for non-ethnic nations,” *Nations and Nationalism* 10, no. 1:2 (2004), 50.

⁹⁸ Umut Ozkirimli, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 38.

⁹⁹ Brown, 22.

label evokes hatred or disdain, then we become more conscious of it so as to either assert it strongly, or deliberately retreat from it.”¹⁰⁰

Constructivism, as such, is a valuable tool for examining Boswell’s nationalist project throughout the *London Journal*. With the framework’s focus on insecurity, simple/simplistic formulas and solutions, and the influential role played by one’s interactions with those around them, the approach seems almost to have been formulated with Boswell specifically in mind. Constructivism’s characterization of nationalism as a heuristic tool or worldview will also prove particularly useful, as this is how nationalism most often manifests itself throughout Boswell’s musings. While constructivist approaches may have been articulated only recently, this nationalist framework is just as applicable (and convincing) when applied to Boswell in the 1760s as it is to individuals in the modern day; the approach will not only help to explicate Boswell’s nationalist project – Boswell’s nationalist project will also vindicate many of the assertions constructivists make about the nature of national identity.

As stated above, constructivists posit that insecurity drives individuals to turn to nationalism for a sense of identity, and Boswell’s insecurity was indeed the impetus for his attempted re-nationalization. Boswell, in his first week in London, described his previous character as “a rattling uncultivated one”,¹⁰¹ and wrote shortly thereafter that his friend Johnston’s observation that Boswell had turned out as something of a comic figure had “struck deep”, as Boswell also feared that he had become “a very inferior being”; and it was only upon his arrival in London that Boswell believed he was able to begin refashioning himself into someone dignified.¹⁰² This insecurity was amplified by bouts of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 47. (21 November)

¹⁰² Ibid., 62. (1 December)

melancholy, which Boswell wrote were at their severest five years prior to his London sojourn, but continued to hamper him throughout the *Journal*. Boswell's companions were well-aware of his predilection for bouts of melancholy; Eglinton pointed out on January 25 that Boswell's melancholy was what led him to suggest the footguards in the first place, as he "though the gaiety of a military life was the best thing in the world to keep off that melancholy to which you was a little subject."¹⁰³ Boswell confided in his private letters accompanying the *Journal* to Johnston that:

I have been of late rather too dissipated. It is a very unhappy situation of mind... And yet a Man on whom the gloomy Daemon of Melancholy takes strong effect is often glad to fly to Dissipation for relief. This is much my case, and when groaning under the pressure of dark despair, I give up all my high ideas of propriety and of dignity...¹⁰⁴

Boswell directly equated melancholy with derailing his "high ideas of propriety and of dignity", the character that he was explicitly constructing in his time in London. Boswell's insecurity about his character and identity, compounded by his bouts of melancholy, ultimately drove him toward nationalism as a solution to this uncertainty and self-doubt.

Boswell's remedy to this insecurity is explicable and understandable when examined in the context of the constructivist framework, which, as discussed, appeals to insecure individuals by offering "simple and indeed simplistic formulas of identity", along with diagnoses of problems.¹⁰⁵ To solve the "problem" of lacking the genteel identity that he desired, Boswell struck upon a solution that was inarguably a simple formula of identity: Scottishness is *bad*, and Englishness is *good*. As such, in order to refashion himself into the composed, independent, and respected gentleman that he

¹⁰³ Ibid., 168. (25 January)

¹⁰⁴ Boswell & Johnston, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, 20.

desired to be, all Boswell had to do was stop being Scottish, and start being English. This solution manifested itself in the way constructivists characterize nationalism: it became Boswell's worldview, a heuristic tool and ideological lens that filtered his entire time in London, both in the way that he viewed himself (and the success of his project) and the way that he viewed those around him. Boswell may not have been exactly sure what constituted Englishness or Scottishness (as will be demonstrated), but again, this is perfectly in line with the constructivist framework: nationalism, as a category of understanding, is constructed intuitively and on the fly, not through explicit rationalization¹⁰⁶ – and this category of understanding, while constructivist in nature, was also coloured by the 'popular primordialism' overtly shared by Boswell and those he interacted with.

Boswell's first meeting with his lifelong friend, Samuel Johnson, is indicative of the primordialist sentiments of Boswell and the people he meets, as well as the role nationalism plays as a lens for identity. Boswell relates his first meeting with the Doctor:

I drank tea at Davies's in Russell Street, and about seven came in the great Mr. Samuel Johnson, whom I have so long wished to see. Mr. Davies introduced me to him. As I knew his mortal antipathy at the Scotch, I cried to Davies, 'Don't tell where I come from.' However, he said, 'From Scotland.' 'Mr. Johnson,' said I, 'indeed I come from Scotland, but I cannot help it.' 'Sir,' replied he, 'that, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help.'¹⁰⁷

It is apparent that Boswell fully expects Johnson to judge him (negatively) based on his nationality, and attempts to prevent Mr. Davies from bringing it up. Johnson's statement – that Scots are unable to help being from Scotland – is also more than just a clever quip; here, Johnson is asserting the popular primordialist belief that nationality determines

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁰⁷ Boswell, *London Journal*, 260. (16 May)

one's character. This commonly-shared principle is clearly at work in this situation: Boswell's Scottishness is treated as the first and most important aspect of his identity and personality (as it would be with all other Scots), and the national character that Johnson believes Scots share makes Boswell self-conscious. Here is also an illustration of how constructivism and primordialism work together in the minds of the participants in shaping their experiences: for Johnson, beliefs about the intrinsic nature of national identity (popular primordialism) lead to a worldview or ideological lens (constructivism) through which he will – at least, as Boswell fears – be judging the people with whom he interacts; Johnson's Scottophobia can be seen as the result of these two aspects of nationalism interacting. This is a phenomenon that will define Boswell's own worldview and experience throughout his time in London.

This pattern, and the importance of nationalism in Boswell's worldview, is demonstrated through the character sketches Boswell provided when meeting people throughout his time in London, especially in regards to his Scottish compatriots. The people that Boswell encountered whom he determines to be lacking or offensive in some respect are not described without reference to their Scottish national identity – while the English are, on the whole, spared this nation-centered attack on their character. Boswell holds the primordialist belief that nationality determines character, and that national identity is pre-eminent amongst other forms of identity. This allows for what constructivists would describe as the ideological lens that shaped Boswell's worldview and judgments about those he interacted with (especially his fellow Scots); Boswell's "simple formula" for identity, in which Scottishness is bad and Englishness is good, led him to harsh condemnations of his countrymen.

A number of entries serve to illustrate Boswell's connection of Scottishness with negative personality traits. In dealing with his Scottish landlord, Mr. Terrie, Boswell pointed out that the man lacked "English manners", to which Mr. Terrie responded with what Boswell characterized as a look of "Northland sulkiness."¹⁰⁸ Mr. Terrie's wife was similarly characterized, as Boswell wrote: "She proved to be an abominable, cunning, revengeful little wretch. There is really in Scotland a species of low insidious wicked women worse than any creatures in the world."¹⁰⁹ With the Ladies of Kellie, Boswell would similarly explain the intolerability of the women by referencing their Scottishness: "After supper we had some altercation about standards of taste, and they grew hot and showed a strong example of the Edinburgh women's roughness of manners, which disgusted me. They have all too-great violence in dispute, and are sometimes put quite out of humour by it."¹¹⁰ The Laird of Spottiswoode was immediately described by Boswell as "quite a *braid-Scots man*," and he went on to explain that the Laird and his brother "are both crammed with knowledge of families and places in Scotland, and have both a sort of greasy drollery,"¹¹¹ again juxtaposing negative personality traits with national identity. Boswell concurred with Mr. Donaldson's assessment of the population of Edinburgh, writing that "he observed justly that there is a degree of low cunning and malevolence amongst the vulgar, and a want of humour and spirit. And also, amongst the better sort a deal of ill-bred coarse raillery and freedom of abusive speech."¹¹² It is clear that Boswell associated the Scottish national character with negative personality traits –

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 290. (6 July)

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 208. (1 March)

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 80. (11 December)

¹¹¹ Ibid., 215. (13 March)

¹¹² Ibid., 211. (4 March)

and this association shaped his paradigm and process of self-fashioning throughout his time in London.

In line with his Scots-as-obstacles worldview, Boswell repeatedly described Scottish company as intolerable, vexing, or even painful, and thus distanced himself from other Scots as well as from his own Scottishness. Boswell wrote that in regards to the arrival of the Kellies that, “To tell the plain truth, I was vexed at their coming. For to see just the plain *hamely* Fife family hurt my grand ideas of London.”¹¹³ Boswell considered an evening of conversation in January with the Dempsters “but as low and insipid” in comparison to the London manners he was now (he insists) accustomed to, and “the Fife tongue and the Niddry’s Wynd address were quite hideous.”¹¹⁴ Similarly, Boswell wrote in June that his progress in his quest to refashion himself had put him above the “disgusting” company of his countrymen, relating that: “After getting into, or studying to get into, a proper well-behaved plan, with the assistance of my friend Temple, the Scotch tones and rough and roaring freedom of manners which I heard today disgusted me a good deal.”¹¹⁵ Boswell wrote that he “was hurt with a mixture of the Edinburgh familiarity and raillery”¹¹⁶ when conversing with one Dr. Robinson, and that on a day in early July, that he and his companions “gathered many more Scotsmen, and the conversation grew familiar to a detestable degree. I therefore left them; happy to be rid of their rude want of distinction,”¹¹⁷ making clear his feelings about the tolerability of his countrymen. Even when he went to hear his friend, Dr. Blair, preach – something Boswell thought “would have done me good” – Boswell found that he could not tolerate

¹¹³ Ibid., 61. (1 December)

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 116. (1 January)

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 272. (3 June)

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 310. (19 July)

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 298-299. (9 July)

his countrymen: “Blair’s New Kirk delivery and the Dissenters roaring out the Psalms sitting on their backsides, together with the extempore prayers, and in short the whole vulgar idea of the Presbyterian worship, made me very gloomy.”¹¹⁸ However, Boswell had a remedy for this vexing setback: “I therefore hastened from this place to St. Paul’s, where I heard the conclusion of service, and had my mind set right again”¹¹⁹ – a statement that is indicative of the prescriptive nature of Boswell’s constructed worldview, with Scottishness having upset his mind, and Englishness being the method through which he can right it again. It is clear that in Boswell’s paradigm, he sees himself as above his Scottish countrymen, as he continually linked their inborn Scottishness with negative personality traits – and the way he believed he could maintain this superiority and refashion himself was through adopting Englishness.

To return to the constructivist framework, Boswell’s quest to refashion himself hinged on a simple/simplistic nationalist formula and diagnosis of the problem – Scottishness was intolerable – and this paradigm became prescriptive, with Englishness presented by Boswell as the way to improve himself and lessen his Scottishness. This prescription for success manifested itself in Boswell’s descriptions of Scotsmen he meets who had become acceptably English in Boswell’s view; while Boswell (as previously discussed) was virtually relentless in his harsh negative judgments of the Scots he met throughout his time in London, there were two notable exceptions, in April and May. First was Colonel Tayler, a member of Erskine’s regiment, whom Boswell described as “a man of good sense, vivacity, and humour, an excellent cheerful temper” – unparalleled praise levelled at a Scot at this point, but explicable in Boswell’s framework when he

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 259. (15 May)

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

then continued the praise with the statement that Tayler “speaks English more properly and easily than most people; which even in an Englishman is a very rare thing.”¹²⁰ Rather than disdaining Tayler as Boswell does the great majority of the Scots he met in London, Boswell wrote nothing but glowing praise; for this was a Scot who had mastered English conversation, above and beyond even actual Englishmen. A month later, Boswell met one Mr. Trotter, described as “originally from Scotland, but has been here so long that he is become quite an Englishman. He is a bachelor, an honest, hearty, good-humored fellow.”

¹²¹ Again, as with Tayler, Boswell juxtaposed – or perhaps even explicated – the pleasing character of Trotter with his perceived Englishness. As demonstrated earlier, Boswell frequently placed negative personality traits within the framework of his subject’s Scottishness, and here we see a similar phenomenon – positive personality traits situated in regards to Englishness. Boswell remained primordialist in his thinking – as always, these men were immediately described with reference to their nationality – but the prescriptive nature of his nationalist paradigm is also illustrated, with Boswell casting Scots who have “overcome” their Scottishness – his same quest – in a positive light.

Boswell may have lauded Englishness throughout his *Journal*, but he never made explicit what exactly it means to be *English*, except that it is *not* the Scottishness that grates on him. Constructivists assert that national identities are constructed intuitively and unconsciously rather than rationally, and this appears to be the case with Boswell’s considerations of nationalism. Boswell’s paradigm is a simple/simplistic heuristic tool that (he believed) served him just fine throughout his time in London, and when Boswell

¹²⁰ Ibid., 236. (8 April)

¹²¹ Ibid., 262. (19 May)

did attempt to explicitly explore English identity, it ended in worrisome failure. On December 15, Boswell sets out to engage in a stereotypical English day:

The enemies of the people of England who would have them considered in the worst light represent them as selfish, beef-eaters, and cruel. In this view I resolved today to be a true-born Old Englishman. I went into the City to Dolly's Steak-house in Paternoster Row and swallowed my dinner by myself to fulfill the charge of selfishness; I had a large fat beefsteak to fulfil the charge of beef-eating; and I went at five o'clock to the Royal Cockpit in St. James's Park and saw cock-fighting for about five hours to fulfill the charge of cruelty.¹²²

Boswell struck upon very common English stereotypes, as Langford points out in his *Englishness Identified*; violence, self-centeredness, and John Bull's legendary love of beefsteak were all widely-held perceptions of the English,¹²³ and the fact that Boswell latches onto only the most obvious and widely-held stereotypes illustrated his basic understanding of Englishness.

While Boswell may have begun his stereotypical English day as something of a joke, he ended up being deeply disconcerted by the endeavour. For a man ostensibly pursuing a military career, the violence and cruelty of the cockfights mortified Boswell, along with what he saw as a complete lack of compassion and pity for the roosters on the part of the English audience. As such, the experience resulted in the opposite effect of what Boswell had intended: rather than becoming more English, he actually felt less connected to the English than he ever had, concluding in his *Journal*: "Thus did I complete my true English day, and came home pretty much fatigued and pretty much confounded at the strange turn of this people."¹²⁴ Rather than reaching a deeper understanding of the English, Boswell was drained and deeply unsettled, his language

¹²² Ibid., 86. (15 December)

¹²³ Langford, 137, 291.

¹²⁴ Boswell, *London Journal*, 87. (15 December)

(“this people”) betraying his consternation at the disconnect between what he witnessed, and his ideal construct of the English character that he hoped to achieve in London.

As primordialists assert, one’s national identity is powerful and innate and cannot be easily changed or cast aside (if at all), and Boswell struggled with this. As scholars of Scottish national identity like Armstrong, Osbourne, and Finlay assert, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what constituted Scottishness, but one thing was clear: it mostly consisted of being “not English,” and most often surfaced in the face of English discrimination.¹²⁵ This was also the case during Boswell’s time in London – as much as Boswell decried and rejected Scottishness in himself and those around him, he still possessed a powerful, reactive Scottish nationalism that manifested itself in his *Journal*. In the primordialist framework, people possess an emotional attachment to their nation of origin which cannot be denied, and there exists a moral imperative to stand up for this identity. Although Boswell seeks to replace his Scottishness with Englishness, this project is complicated by his emotional, (and, as primordialists assert, innate) loyalty to Scotland when faced with English opposition – as with the famous incident at Covent Garden theatre.

On December 8, Boswell recounted:

At night I went to Covent Garden saw *Love in a Village*, a new comic opera. I liked it much. I saw it from the gallery, but I was first in the pit. Just before the overture began to be played, two Highland officers came in. The mob in the upper gallery roared out, ‘No Scots! No Scots! Out with them!’, hissed and pelted them with apples. My heart warmed to my countrymen, my Scotch blood boiled with indignation. I jumped up on the benches, roared out, ‘Damn you, you rascals!’, hissed and was in the greatest rage. I am very sure at that time I should have been the most distinguished of heroes. I hated the English; I wished from my soul that

¹²⁵ Brian D. Osborne and Ronald Armstrong, *Scotch Obsessions* (Great Britain: Birlinn, Ltd., 1996), 55; Finlay, 149-150.

the Union was broke and that we might give them another battle of Bannockburn.¹²⁶

For all his railing against Scots throughout his time in London, here Boswell seemed to justify assertions of reactionary, “knee-jerk”¹²⁷ Scottishness and primordialist claims of the undeniable emotional attachment (and moral obligations) of one’s national identity.

Boswell continued, relating his interaction with the Highland officers at the theatre:

I went close to the officers and asked them of what regiment they were of. They told me Lord John Murray’s, and that they were just come from the Havana. ‘And this,’ said they, ‘is the thanks that we get—to be hissed when we come home. If it was French, what could they do worse?’ ‘But,’ said one, ‘if I had a *grup o yin or twa o the tamd rascals I sud let them ken what they’re about.*’ The rudeness of the English vulgar is terrible. This indeed is the liberty which they have: the liberty of bullying and being abusive with their blackguard tongues. They soon gave over.¹²⁸

Here, Boswell demonstrated a real feeling of solidarity with his fellow Scots, united in their disgust with the English crowd at the theatre. While Boswell may have spent the majority of his time in London disparaging the Scots around him, he still immediately leapt to their defence when he perceived that the English were publicly doing the same thing. Boswell’s national sentiments were not as clear-cut as he often made them out to be: despite his frequently-stated feelings about Scottishness and his countrymen, his immediate – *natural*, as primordialists would claim – reaction was one of coming to the aid of his countrymen and utterly despising the English who dared mistreat them. This incident does not seem to fit within the framework that Boswell attempted to construct throughout his time in London – in fact, it directly contradicts his simple “good Englishness/bad Scottishness” dichotomy – and it illustrates the vivid emotional attachment to one’s innate national identity that primordialists insist upon.

¹²⁶ Boswell, *London Journal*, 71-72. (8 December)

¹²⁷ Osbourne & Armstrong, 55.

¹²⁸ Boswell, *London Journal*, 72. (8 December)

The episode at Covent Garden was not the only time that Boswell demonstrated a confusing loyalty to his Scottish heritage in spite of how he otherwise attempted to portray Scottishness throughout the *Journal* – he would do so again, also at Covent Garden theatre, a month later. On January 18, Boswell and his companions Dempster and Erskine were excited about the chance to go out and “exert themselves damning” the play *Elvira*, which Boswell explained was written by an “arrant puppy” named David Mallet.¹²⁹ Boswell immediately pointed out that this was not the author’s real name, Mallet having changed it from the Scottish “Malloch”, which Boswell felt was significant, for as Pottle explains: Mallet was widely hated by Scots like Boswell, Erskine, and Dempster for having “betrayed” his Scottish heritage; he not only adopted an English name, he also mastered English speech and manners to such a degree that his Scottish heritage was undetectable – even by the great Dr. Johnson.¹³⁰ It would seem logical that Boswell would idealize this man for having accomplished exactly the goal that Boswell repeatedly, explicitly sets out for himself during his time in London, but apparently Boswell could find fault with those who were *too* successful at accomplishing his own ambition.

Boswell and his compatriots went to great (and unsuccessful) lengths to “damn” Mallet’s *Elvira*, even after it became clear that the play did not deserve damning. First, he and his companions showed up at the play with cudgels and attempted to turn the audience against it with catcalls, motivated by a “generous resentment in their breasts.”¹³¹ When this failed, he and his companions resolved to publish a scathing review of the play (at their own personal expense),¹³² going so far as to include (alleged) remarks that David

¹²⁹ Ibid., 154. (18 January)

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 155. (18 January)

Hume made in personal conversation with Boswell and Erskine disparaging Mallet's works and abilities, resulting in a vitriolic reprimand from Hume that Boswell included in his *Journal* on February 24, and acknowledged that he probably deserved.¹³³ This is a jarring example of Boswell's confused relationship with his homeland; while he repeatedly asserted his wish to become a "good" Englishman and reject his Scottish heritage, there still existed deep, unconscious ties of loyalty to his home country that drove him to some lengths to punish a Scotsman who had accomplished Boswell's very same goal.

In Boswell's quest for identity during his time in London, the most important element informing his attempts to refashion himself was nationalism. Boswell, however, does not fit into the dominant historiographical model of nationalism at this time – in fact, he seems to refute many of the popular core assessments regarding Britishness in the eighteenth century: for Boswell, this was simply a phenomenon that did not exist. In his worldview, only Scottishness and Englishness existed. The interdisciplinary frameworks of primordialism and constructivism are, however, useful in explicating and understanding Boswell's approach to, feelings about, and struggles with national identity throughout the *Journal*. Primordialism is helpful in its assertion that nationalism is the most important factor in a person's identity, and the framework draws attention to how this idea pervades Boswell's perceptions of those around him. Boswell's assessments of the people he meets are unabashedly primordialist, Boswell clearly illustrating an apparent belief that – as primordialists argue – nationality is an intrinsic aspect of people's personalities, Boswell's own beliefs in line with primordialist scholars' belief in "national characteristics" that are static and determine one's nature. The powerful

¹³³ Ibid., 207. (24 February)

influence one's homeland exerts over one's personality is also seen in Boswell's *Journal*; try as he might to overcome his Scottishness, Boswell was still clearly possessed of a powerful emotional and natural loyalty to Scotland that manifested itself in reactionary ways. Here is also an illustration of how primordialist and constructivist approaches work in concert – the “popular primordialism” that Boswell held to be true operated as the worldview/ideological lens through which Boswell perceived and judged himself and those around him – the primary function of nationalism, according to constructivists. As well, constructivism also focuses on nationalism's use in diagnosing – and prescribing simple solutions for – insecurity faced by the individual in regards to their identity, and this was most definitely the case in Boswell's approach to his own character: he adopted a simplistic English/Scottish dichotomy in his quest to refashion himself, and this served as his most oft-used heuristic tool in regards to analyzing and attempting to modify his own personality. Boswell's worldview was one that hinged on nationalism above all else, and this would have important implications throughout his time in London – especially in regards to his beliefs about manliness and his approach to becoming a distinguished London gentleman.

Chapter 2: “To observe politeness”: Nationalism and Boswell’s Manliness

Manliness was an important aspect of Boswell’s quest to refashion himself in London. As Philip Carter observes, Boswell was “particularly sensitive to the subject of manliness”, and spent much of his *Journal* reflecting on his own desire for manhood, as well as the manliness of those around him.¹³⁴ Boswell’s confidence in his manliness waxed and waned throughout his time in London as he reflected upon his actions (the stated purpose of his *Journal*¹³⁵), sometimes asserting his manhood: “I am an independent man. I think myself as good as anybody,”¹³⁶ but also questioning it, fearing that he would not achieve his manly potential:

For really, to speak seriously, I think there is a blossom about me of something more distinguished than the generality of mankind. But I am much afraid that this blossom will never swell into fruit, but will be nipped and destroyed by many a blighting heat and chilling frost.¹³⁷

Boswell’s approach to manliness was, in many ways, quite typical for the eighteenth century: an ongoing process of “becoming”, as Johnson had defined it – but most importantly, an “effortful becoming” which was not always successful.¹³⁸ As with his Scottishness and Englishness, Boswell’s manliness was an aspect of his identity that he was insecure about and struggled with throughout his time in London – the penultimate line of his *Journal* being: “Let me be manly,”¹³⁹ illustrating that Boswell never did resolve the issue to his satisfaction by the time he left for Holland. As with his approach to national identity, Boswell attempted to remedy this perceived lack of manliness

¹³⁴ Philip Carter, “James Boswell’s manliness.” In *English Masculinities, 1660-1800*. Tim Hitchcock and Michele Cohen, eds. New York: Longman, 1999), 112.

¹³⁵ Boswell wrote in the introduction to his *Journal*: “The ancient philosopher certainly gave a wise counsel when he said, ‘Know thyself.’ For surely this knowledge is of all the most important... A man cannot know himself better than by attending to the feelings of his heart and to his external actions, from which he may with tolerable certainty judge ‘what manner of person he is.’” See Boswell, *London Journal*, 39.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 82. (13 December)

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 161. (20 January)

¹³⁸ See Stephen H. Gregg, *Defoe’s Writings and Manliness* (England: Ashgate, 2009), 1.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 333. (3 August)

through the adoption of a prescriptive worldview that could guide him toward becoming the man he wished to be, and this paradigm was one that was almost entirely shaped by his already-established beliefs about national identity. Believing firmly in the popular conception of “polite manliness” at the time, Boswell utilized his Scottish/English dichotomy in attempting to achieve manhood by explicitly modelling himself after Englishmen, constructing and portraying Scottishness as anathema to manliness, and by adopting the uniquely English focus on taciturnity as an important benchmark for judging his success.¹⁴⁰

It is worth noting that while Boswell may not have fit into the dominant historiography of eighteenth-century British nationalism, the opposite is true in the case of eighteenth-century masculinities; Boswell fits (or rather, strove to fit) the model of eighteenth-century manliness that was defined/determined by politeness, most succinctly defined by Michele Cohen as “the intricate play of manners, language, self-display, sociability and *je ne sais quoi*.”¹⁴¹ While both sexual identity and social behaviour were two important aspects of manliness at the time (as they are in any time), Karen Harvey points out that the historiography of this period stresses the significance of the latter, as “the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries feature a distinctive manly type, as

¹⁴⁰ It is important to note that while there are other conceptions of manliness at this time than the distinctly-British approach of ‘politeness’, Boswell’s experience bears out the arguments for polite masculinity while sharing very little with conceptions of manliness centering on opposition to the effeminacy of “fops” or “mollies”. As Stephen H. Gregg writes, “a number of studies have argued, effeminacy... especially exemplified in the figure of the fop, connotes excess and also functions as an outer marker boundary for acceptable polite manliness.” Boswell, however, sets his ‘polite manliness’ in opposition to his Scottish countrymen almost exclusively; Boswell makes no mentions of fops or other effeminate men throughout his time in London. See Gregg, 7. Rosalind Carr agrees with Gregg’s assessment, noting that the boundaries of manliness were often established with regard to the effeminate fop. See Rosalind Carr, “The Gentleman and the Soldier: Patriotic Masculinities in Eighteenth Century Scotland.” *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 28.2 (2008), 106-107. Nonetheless, the ‘fop’ is a figure completely absent in Boswell’s *Journal*.

¹⁴¹ Michele Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 42.

the polite gentleman moves center stage.”¹⁴² Rosalind Carr concurs, identifying the polite, refined gentleman as the “dominant model”, and polite civility as “the crucial ingredient in masculinity.”¹⁴³ As Cohen explains, politeness in the eighteenth century was “central to the self-fashioning of the gentleman. Its main expressive form, its ‘master metaphor’, was conversation,”¹⁴⁴ and this is an approach to masculinity which Boswell subscribed wholeheartedly – Boswell’s conception of manliness was one in which conversation was the arena where he could establish or achieve his manhood.¹⁴⁵

It may seem odd to focus on politeness instead of sexuality when examining Boswell’s manliness – as famous as he is for his exploits – but Boswell identified politeness as a far more important aspect of his masculinity. As Philip Carter explains, “Boswell had shown himself to be a careful student of politeness, an attribute which, from the early 1760s, he treated as a key means to effect his own progression from youth to adulthood, from boyhood to manhood.”¹⁴⁶ Continuing with Carter’s assessment, Boswell’s *Journal* depicted the ideal man as a good conversationalist, one who followed the major tenets of “manly politeness”: sociability and reserve.¹⁴⁷ While Boswell did engage in a number of trysts throughout his time in London, they were not nearly as important to Boswell in his quest to establish his manhood as was mastering polite

¹⁴² Karen Harvey, “The History of Masculinity, circa 1650-1800.” *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (April 2005), 301.

¹⁴³ Carr, 104.

¹⁴⁴ Carter, *Boswell*, 123.

¹⁴⁵ Carr points out that while dominant, this was not the sole framework of manliness operating at this time, and notes in particular a ‘martial’ manliness based around military service and defence of one’s nation that was popular, particularly in the Highlands, at this time. However, this competing model of masculinity was, as she explains, very geographically divided and confined to areas outside of Boswell’s realm. As such, it was a model of manliness that Boswell did not utilize in his efforts to be recognized as manly. See Carr, 103, 105.

¹⁴⁶ Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (England: Pearson Education, Ltd., 1998), 184.

¹⁴⁷ Carter, *Boswell*, 123.

sociability.¹⁴⁸ These sexual incidents were far less likely to entail any sort of self-reflection on Boswell's part (if any); sex was a part of Boswell's life in London, but it was not an important part of his quest to refashion himself into his conception of an idealized gentleman, which he defined in terms of dignity, gentility, and sociability.¹⁴⁹

When Boswell's sexual encounters are juxtaposed with considerations of politeness in his *Journal* – for, as Carter points out, Boswell considered politeness “even at moments of overt sexuality”¹⁵⁰ – it becomes clear which of these Boswell regarded as more important in terms of manliness. Boswell's portrayal of his notorious courtship of the actress Louisa, whom he first met on December 14, and saw for the last time on January 20, illustrates Boswell's prioritization of the differing aspects of his masculinity. While Boswell did consider his conquest and sexual prowess to be a testament to one aspect of his manliness (proclaiming, at one point, his “Godlike vigour” for having satisfied a woman five times in a single night¹⁵¹), he was also sure to include references to politeness even in these situations, believing that mere sexual conquest was not enough to establish his manhood. Boswell considered his seduction technique throughout to have been manly, as he “treated [Louisa] all along with a distant politeness,”¹⁵² and his conclusion of the saga is telling: when Boswell contracted gonorrhoea and ended the relationship, he did not – as Carter points out – attempt to salvage his manhood through references to his sexual prowess throughout, but rather by stressing his self-control and

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 114-115.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 115.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 128-129.

¹⁵¹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 139. (12 January)

¹⁵² Ibid., 97. (20 December)

genteel demeanour when reprimanding Louisa: “During all this conversation I really behaved with a manly composure and polite dignity that could not fail to inspire awe.”¹⁵³

Boswell would continue this theme throughout his time in London; in July, he devoted a dozen lines toward considering the (lack of) politeness of Hume’s Poker Club and how this affected him, and then juxtaposed a reference to his sexual exploits as an unreflected-upon afterthought: “This afternoon I had some low debauchery with girls who patrol the courts in the Temple.”¹⁵⁴ Similarly, when Boswell had dressed up as a “blackguard” and engaged with (or, more properly, forced himself upon) a number of prostitutes in St. James’s park in early June, he concluded not with an affirmation of his manliness in light of his sexual (mis)adventures, but instead with the observation that he was pleased that his genteel character was obvious despite his clothing: “My vanity was somewhat gratified tonight that, notwithstanding of my dress, I was always taken for a gentleman in disguise.”¹⁵⁵ As in the episode with Louisa, these incidents illustrate that while sexuality was undeniably an aspect of Boswell’s manhood, it is one that Boswell largely took for granted – he gave very little, if any, thought to these incidents and how they affected his character – and he often followed accounts of his conquests with considerations of his politeness and gentility. It was, invariably, his politeness, not his prowess, that led him to positive judgments of his own character and progress towards manhood. Sex was important to Boswell, but he was sure to make clear that politeness

¹⁵³ Carter, *Boswell*, 128-129; Boswell, *London Journal*, 160. As Thomas King argues, even during the time of confinement while treating his venereal disease, Boswell seized on the opportunity to fashion himself into a manly stoic; “He fashioned himself as the stoic man who balanced retirement and sociability, reflection and expression, pleasure and restraint.” His sexual misfortune was turned into an opportunity to further refashion himself into the gentleman of reserve he wished to be. See King, 340.

¹⁵⁴ Boswell, *London Journal*, 300. (14 July)

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 273. (4 June)

was, by far, more important, and it was this polite manliness that Boswell strove for throughout his time in London.

Boswell's attempts to fashion himself into a polite gentleman were shaped by his nationalist worldview that condemned Scottishness and praised Englishness, and this approach first manifested itself in his stated desire to emulate idealized Englishmen, frequently referring to individuals with manly qualities Boswell desired for himself.¹⁵⁶ At the outset of his *Journal*, Boswell explained the type of character he had hoped to achieve through the adoption of English traits that he saw as representative of model characteristics of polite manliness: "I hoped by degrees to attain some degree of propriety. Mr. Addison's character in sentiment, mixed with a little of the gaiety of Sir Richard Steele and the manners of Mr. Digges, were the ideas which I aimed to realize."

¹⁵⁷ As Thomas A. King points out, West Digges in particular served as a model for Boswell, as "Digges represented for Boswell polite manners... and sociability,"¹⁵⁸ and while Boswell also emulated Digges at times of sexuality (posing as his cousin when trysting with Louisa at Haywood's Inn¹⁵⁹), he still made explicit why he placed Digges on a pedestal – his politeness. Boswell wrote:

Indeed, I must say that Digges has more or as much of the deportment of a man of fashion as anybody I ever saw; and he keeps up this so well that he never once lessened upon me even on an intimate acquaintance, although he is now and then somewhat melancholy, under which it is very difficult to preserve dignity, and this I think is particularly to be admired in Mr. Digges. Indeed, he and I never came to familiarity, which is justly said to beget contempt. The great art of living easy and happy in society is to study proper behaviour, and even with our most intimate friends to observe politeness; otherwise we will insensibly treat each other with a

¹⁵⁶ Carter, *Boswell*, 112.

¹⁵⁷ Boswell, *London Journal*, 62. (1 December)

¹⁵⁸ King, 306.

¹⁵⁹ King, 306; Boswell, *London Journal*, 137.

degree of rudeness, and each will find himself despised in some measure by the other.¹⁶⁰

While more famous for his extravagance and romantic dalliances,¹⁶¹ Boswell idealized Digges specifically for his unerring commitment to politeness, and through his reflections on Digges' character, Boswell again reinforced his belief that politeness was paramount in regards to manliness.

While this initial musing on manliness focused on ideals that he had hoped to adopt, most of Boswell's consideration of the topic took the form of analysis of his interactions with Englishmen, and the improving influence this had on his character. These considerations demonstrate that Boswell saw exposure to the English as a key means of affecting his transition to polite manhood. Much of this was facilitated by Boswell's college friend, William Johnson Temple. As Pottle explains, Boswell saw in Temple "something of the refinement of mind and manners which he associated with an English rather than a Scottish background,"¹⁶² and Temple was thus suited to be Boswell's primary enabler (in the form of providing English contacts), as well as a benchmark by which he measured his own success.

On May 13, Boswell was introduced to one Norton Nicholls, one of Temple's associates from Cambridge. Boswell was enamoured with Nicholls: "I never saw anybody who engaged me more at the very first than this gentleman. He discovered an amiable disposition, a sweetness of manners, and an easy politeness that pleased me much."¹⁶³ Boswell described their conversation in detail, and congratulated himself on

¹⁶⁰ Boswell, *London Journal*, 62-63. (1 December)

¹⁶¹ Phyllis T. Dircks, 'Digges, West (1725?-1786)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7640>, accessed 16 Aug 2010]

¹⁶² Pottle, in Boswell & Erskine, xvii.

¹⁶³ Boswell, *London Journal*, 257-258. (13 May)

“talking really very well”, his avoidance of ludicrous nonsense and mirth, and his composure and reserve.¹⁶⁴ This was a conversational arena where Boswell was truly genteel and manly. Boswell concluded his recounting of this affair thusly:

I had a good opinion of myself, and I could perceive my friend Temple much satisfied with me. Could I but fix myself in such a character and preserve it uniformly, I should be exceedingly happy. I hope to do so and to attain a constancy and dignity without which I can never be satisfied, as I have these ideas strong and pride myself in thinking that my natural character is that of dignity. My friend Temple is very good in consoling me by saying that I may be such a man, and that people will say, ‘Mr. Boswell is quite altered from the dissipated, inconstant fellow that he was. He is now a reserved, grave sort of man. But indeed that was his real character; and he only deviated into these eccentric paths for a while.’¹⁶⁵

Here, Boswell laid out for the reader (himself, and Johnston) exactly what he had hoped to achieve in his quest to refashion himself. Not only was Boswell pleased with himself for proving capable of participating in polite English conversation, but he was sure to note that Temple, as well, was “much satisfied” with his conduct – in English company, Boswell had (temporarily) achieved his idealized vision of manhood, which he hoped he would one day be able to maintain. A very similar evening took place two months later, where Boswell recounted his meeting with another of Temple’s comrades from Cambridge, John Claxton (with Temple present), again making explicit his belief that English company such as this improved his character: “Claxton passed the evening with us. We were very well. Being in such company is improving, at any rate, whether much be said or not, as it accustoms me to decent and polite behaviour.”¹⁶⁶ Through Temple, Boswell was exposed to genteel and polite Englishmen, which Boswell believed improved his character – even if very little was said.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 299. (11 July)

Boswell associated polite conversation with Englishness regardless of the nationality of the person or people who were skilled in it. On May 29, Boswell described a day spent in mixed Scottish, English, and Welsh company as “English” by virtue of its manliness:

I dined with Lord Eglinton. Lord Thanet, Lord Coventry and his brother, and Mr. Price, a Welsh member, were there. It was a day truly English and genteel. I was very comfortable, and spoke a little with a manly confidence.¹⁶⁷

Here, Boswell indicated his belief that polite conversation was inherently English, regardless of the nationalities of those involved: if a man was a polite gentleman, he was (or was acting) English. In a rare instance when Boswell did admit in his *Journal* to looking up to a Scot as a manly ideal (Sir David Dalrymple), he qualified that this was because Dalrymple was like Addison, an Englishman: “Sir David is a man of great ingenuity, a fine scholar, an accurate critic, and a worthy member of society. From my early years I used to regard him with admiration and awe, and look upon him as a representative of Mr. Addison.”¹⁶⁸ Boswell’s conception of manliness was shaped by his nationalist worldview and his prescription for refashioning himself: polite masculinity was inherently English, and it was through Englishness that it could be achieved.

It followed, then, that Boswell believed that Englishness could be achieved, and replace unmannerly and rattling Scottishness. This can be seen in the previously-mentioned examples of Colonel Tayler and Mr. Trotter, friends of Erskine, whom Boswell judged to be gentleman because they spoke “English more properly and easily than most people,” and had been in London long enough to “become quite an

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 270. (29 May)

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 188. (10 February)

Englishman”, respectively.¹⁶⁹ Boswell approved of their genteel character, and explained this by reference to their Englishness – they may have been born Scottish, but they became polite gentlemen by virtue of their adopted Englishness.

Boswell also illustrated this belief in his relation of incidents in which Scotsmen and Englishmen clashed in conversations (significantly, as it was the arena in which manliness was achieved and demonstrated). This was a microcosm of Boswell’s nationalist belief that English manliness could (and would) triumph over Scottish unmanliness – not just in these exchanges, but also in his own identity and character, just as it had in the “reformed” Scotsmen, Tayler and Trotter. On July 6, Boswell related a confrontation between John Ogilvie, a Scottish poet and clergymen, and the famous Dr Samuel Johnson. Boswell described Ogilvie as a “rank Scot”, and commented on how poorly he fared in the debate: “how great a man a London wit is in comparison of one of your country swans,” as Ogilvie failed to defend his native country despite having used “all the powers that he could muster up.”¹⁷⁰ The discussion concluded – to applause – with Johnson’s assertion that “the noblest prospect that a Scotsman ever sees is the road which leads him to England!”¹⁷¹ Here, Boswell laid out his opinion of lacklustre Scottish skills in conversation and debate, and would reiterate this point again four days later, this time demonstrating his own skill with words and triumph over a Scottish opponent. After an evening spent watching Dr Johnson and Boswell’s friend Dempster match wits, Boswell took up Johnson’s position in an argument with Dempster after the Doctor had left, and recounted that Dempster “was but a feeble antagonist. He appeared to me a very weak man; and I exulted at the triumph of sound principles over sophistry.”¹⁷² Boswell

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 236, 262. (8 April, 19 May)

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 293-294. (6 July)

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 316. (20 July)

made clear his belief that Scots were weak in conversation and debate, and were, as such, weak men. This fit Boswell's paradigm, in which becoming more English would make him a better conversationalist – and thus, more manly.

Boswell saw Englishness as an important part (and catalyst) of polite manliness, and he reinforced this by characterizing Scottishness as anathema to manliness. As previously discussed, in Boswell's character sketches of the Scots he encountered throughout his *Journal*, he typified Scots as intolerable, and this was especially true in regards to their manliness: Boswell made a connection between Scottishness and unmanliness in a number of entries. On March 4, Boswell had dinner with the Scottish painter John Donaldson, whom Boswell described as a contrarian (he “must forsooth controvert established systems. He defended adultery, and he opposed revealed religion.”¹⁷³), but still agreed with his assessment of the upper class in Edinburgh: “However, he observed justly that there is a degree of low cunning and malevolence amongst the vulgar, and a want of humour and spirit. And also, amongst the better sort of a deal of ill-bred coarse raillery and freedom of abusive speech.”¹⁷⁴ Boswell identified this same failing (as referenced earlier) in his friends, the Macfarlanes and Dempsters when he observed that their conversation was “low and insipid,” that their “Fife tongue and the Niddry's Wynd address were quite hideous,” and he was hurt by their “coarse gibes.”¹⁷⁵ Boswell similarly described being “hurt” by Scottish conversation after spending a day in early July with Dr. William Robertson, initially summing up their conversation as “admirable” – uncharacteristic praise of Scottish conversation – but adding, “yet I was hurt with a mixture of the Edinburgh familiarity and raillery,”¹⁷⁶ qualifying what would

¹⁷³ Ibid., 211. (4 March)

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 116. (1 January)

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 288. (2 July)

have otherwise been a pleasant recount of their time together, and drawing attention to one of Boswell's greatest conversational peeves, rattling, which Boswell (as will be discussed below) believed was anathema to manly behaviour.

Boswell did not just characterize his countrymen as unmanly conversationalists behind their backs in his *Journal*, however – he also broached the subject of politeness and reserve with two of his Scottish friends, George Dempster (whom Boswell labelled “the Sublime Savage” in light of his “outrageous sallies” against established opinions¹⁷⁷) and Hugh Blair, recounting:

I brought on the subject of reserve and dignity of behaviour. Macpherson cursed at it, and Blair said he did not like it. It was unnatural, and did not show the weakness of humanity. In my opinion, however, it is a noble quality. It is sure to beget respect and keep impertinence at a distance. No doubt (as Blair affirmed) one must give up a good deal of social mirth. But this I think should not be too much indulged, except among particular friends.¹⁷⁸

Here, Boswell illustrated that Scots were not just impolite conversationalists, but that they actively chose to be this way, further reinforcing his worldview. Boswell was quick to point out that his own views were contrary to his companions', and described his position on the topic very much in the same way he described Dalrymple's laudable politeness, as discussed above. On July 13, Boswell reiterated his belief that his Scottish countrymen were not just simply unmanly or impolite – but that they actively set themselves in opposition to it, as with David Hume's *Poker Club*:

But I must find one fault with all the *Poker Club*, as they are called; that is to say, with all that set who associate with David Hume and Robertson. They are doing all that they can do to destroy politeness. They would abolish all respect due to rank and external circumstances, and they would live like a kind of literary barbarians. For my own share,

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 265-266. (23 May)

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 265-266. (23 May)

I own I would rather want their instructive conversation than be hurt by their rudeness.¹⁷⁹

Boswell stated that he would rather avoid Hume and his ilk altogether than be exposed to their damaging impoliteness, and this is a sentiment that had profound consequences for Boswell throughout his stay in London.

Boswell's worldview, so far as it has been described, was one in which Scots were unmanly, and in which engagement with manly English company improved Boswell. This had important implications for his social behaviour in London: just as Boswell believed exposure to English politeness made him manly, he was consistent in possessing the conviction that exposure to Scottish impoliteness had the opposite effect – and just as he sought English company to improve himself, Boswell actively and self-consciously avoided Scottish company to keep himself on course.

Boswell first mused on Scottish company and his project of achieving manhood in relation to the unwanted December visitation of his distant relatives, the Kellies, comparing their company to that of Thomas Sheridan (an Irishman, but who was London-educated, and had lived in the city for some years, where he taught elocution¹⁸⁰): “I really passed the afternoon very well, and with improvement as well as entertainment. I thought myself much happier than in the Kellie company, where mirth alone is the object; as if man was only formed a risible animal.”¹⁸¹ Here, Boswell stated his belief in English pre-eminence in polite conversation, in comparison to Scottish company, which provided nothing that helped Boswell in his quest to refashion himself. It did not take long for Boswell to incorporate this sentiment into his social calendar. Less than two weeks later,

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 300. (13 July)

¹⁸⁰ Peter Thomson, ‘Sheridan, Thomas (1719?–1788)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25371>, accessed 16 Aug 2010]

¹⁸¹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 92. (17 December)

in his memorandum for the day, Boswell counselled himself on how to improve – as usual, by emulating Englishmen – and immediately juxtaposed this statement with a command to avoid the Kellies, implying that improvement and their company were mutually exclusive: “talk gently and Digges-like. Acquire an easy dignity and black liveliness of behaviour like him. Learn, as Sheridan said, to speak slow and softly. See not Kellies today.”¹⁸² Boswell, however, did not stop at this simple implication that his Scottish relatives should be avoided as obstacles to his project – he would later articulate this sentiment specifically.

In early January, Boswell ignored three separate invitations to the Macfarlane’s (Betty Macfarlane was the sister of Boswell’s close friend, Andrew Erskine), and explained why in his *Journal* entry from January 16:

I had not been at Lady Betty's since Thursday sennight, as I wanted to have nothing but English ideas, and to be as manly as I possibly could. However, I thought they might take amiss my being absent for so long a time without being able to assign them any rational reason for it.¹⁸³

Here, for the first time, Boswell explicitly laid out his belief that exposure to Scottish company prevented him from being as “manly” as he could be – and he avoided their presence as long as was socially acceptable. Boswell again mused on the subject a fortnight later, when he wrote:

I find that I ought not to keep too much company with Scotch people, because I am kept from acquiring propriety of English speaking, and because they prevent my mind from being filled with London images, so that I might as well be in Scotland. For there is little or no difference between being with an entire Scotch company in London and a room in Edinburgh.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ibid., 113. (31 December)

¹⁸³ Ibid., 145. (16 January)

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 177. (3 February)

This entry is significant, for it is the most blatant articulation of Boswell's beliefs about the relationship between his countrymen and his quest to refashion himself: he had come to London to master polite English conversation (read: manliness), and being around Scots would keep that from happening. Boswell restated this sentiment again on March 6, consoling himself for his continuing struggle with manliness, and scapegoating Scottish company as what was holding him back: "Summer will come when all Scots will be gone. Then you'll grow more English and fine."¹⁸⁵ Here, Boswell made clear whom he blamed for his failings, and concluded that once Scots were out of the picture, he would finally become a manly English gentleman.

One of the most important benchmarks utilized by Boswell in measuring his success – or, more properly, his failure – at achieving manliness was nationalist in nature: taciturnity, a distinctly English trait. It is likely that Boswell began to assign priority to this particular characteristic after his religious reading of the *Spectator* and his repeatedly-stated desire to emulate its founder, Joseph Addison. Addison had written in *Spectator* no. 135 that the English language reflected the English national character: "Our Language shows the Genius and natural Temper of the English, which is modest, thoughtful and sincere," and described the English language as "manly and laconic."¹⁸⁶ Cohen best summarizes Addison's feelings about the relationship between the English language and English national character: "For Addison, it was precisely because the English language was 'abounding in Monosyllables', that it was perfectly suited not only to speakers wishing to utter their thoughts quickly and frugally, but to the taciturn English character. 'Loquacity' was the 'enemy'."¹⁸⁷ Boswell, seeking to emulate Addison as he

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 211. (6 March)

¹⁸⁶ *Spectator*, no. 135.

¹⁸⁷ Cohen, 35.

did, had reached the same conclusion, and utilized it in his quest to refashion himself: loquacity was, for Boswell, his greatest enemy in affecting his transition to manhood. As Carter points out, Boswell was particularly sensitive to his repeated failures to show reserve in conversation: “This, he knew, was neither true politeness, nor the route to respectable manhood.”¹⁸⁸

Paul Langford, in his comprehensive work on Englishness, emphasizes taciturnity as one of the most important – and most distinctly – English traits, observing: “The English, men as much as women, had a reputation for being a silent people. Even foreigners who thought inconsistency the essence of Englishness made an exception for taciturnity, one constant characteristic of an Englishman.”¹⁸⁹ Langford also notes that – “as always” – this was a strictly English, not British, phenomenon, and explains how Englishmen distinguished themselves from their neighbours in this regard. While the English may have conceded that their neighbours were more talkative than they were, this was cast as a negative trait:

To concede that Celts, especially the Irish, possessed the ‘gift of gab’ savoured as much of accusation as admiration on an Englishman’s lips. It granted superiority whose real value was not to be admitted, except perhaps in those whose upbringing provided a measure of linguistic discipline.¹⁹⁰

This antagonism went both ways, and Scots in particular condemned English taciturnity; Henry Mackenzie observed in the *Edinburgh Review* that the English believed “conversation spoils good company,” and furthermore, this trait had defined the English for centuries:

¹⁸⁸ Carter, *Boswell*, 123.

¹⁸⁹ Langford, 175-176.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

There is nothing which an Englishman enjoys more than the pleasure of sulkiness,--of not being forced to hear a word from anybody which may occasion to him the necessity of replying. It is not so much that Mr Bull disdains to talk, as that Mr Bull has nothing to say. His forefathers have been out of spirits for six or seven hundred years.¹⁹¹

Whether taciturnity was considered commendable or condemnable, what was clear was that neither the English nor their neighbours denied that silence was a distinctly English characteristic – and one that Boswell strove to achieve in his quest for manhood.

Boswell adopted an English approach to manly conversation that is best summarized by Langford:

Talking too much was an unforgiveable sin for the English, and virtually the definition of a bore... It was axiomatic that silence went with a wise mind and a modest manner. The corollary was that talkativeness implied ignorance and egotism.¹⁹²

Again and again throughout his time in London, Boswell would reprimand himself for over-sharing, rattling, and engaging in rhodomontades, stressing that this epitomized exactly the kind of person he did *not* wish to be. Early in his *Journal*, Boswell explained that his previous character – which he was actively trying to leave behind – was unmanly and rattling. Boswell lamented his disposition before he had arrived in London:

[L]ike a man who takes to drinking to banish care, I threw myself loose as a heedless, dissipated, rattling fellow who might say or do every ridiculous thing. This made me sought after by everybody for the present hour, but I found myself a very inferior being; and I found many people presuming to treat me as such, which notwithstanding of my appearance of undiscerning gaiety, gave me much pain. I was, in short, a character very different from what God intended me and I myself chose.¹⁹³

This was a character that Boswell sought to overcome, and he believed that by leaving behind this rattling and free character, he would become manlier. As Boswell noted

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 198.

¹⁹² Ibid., 177.

¹⁹³ Boswell, *London Journal*, 61-62. (1 December)

almost immediately after his arrival in London, he was becoming quite different from the “rattling uncultivated” boy he had previously been, and while he had previously shared his story with everyone, he now kept his own counsel, and as such, possessed a “manly firmness.”¹⁹⁴

In order to achieve manliness, Boswell felt it necessary to remain ever-vigilant against re-emergences of this past self, and chastised himself repeatedly for his lapses, and resolved to maintain a manly reserve afterwards. Boswell noted after an evening with the Kellies that he was not showing the control he desired, writing: “I let myself out in humorous rhodomontade rather too much.”¹⁹⁵ On an evening with the Macfarlanes, Boswell again noted his failure, and reminded himself of the importance of keeping this failing in check: “I was very hearty at dinner, but was too ridiculous. This is what I ought most to guard against. People in company applaud a man for it very much, but behind his back hold him very cheap.”¹⁹⁶ After sharing the story of what he dubbed his “cheese adventures” (having attempted to alleviate his poverty by subsisting on a diet of cheese) with the Dempsters, Boswell again reprimanded himself: “I am too open and have a desire to let all my affairs be known. This I must endeavour to correct.”¹⁹⁷ Boswell also noted an occasion when his companion Erskine gave him advice very fitting with the counsel that he repeatedly gave himself in his *Journal*: “He gave me a very sensible advice against repeating what people said, which may do much harm. I have an unlucky custom of doing so. I acknowledged my error and promised to be on my guard.”¹⁹⁸ The

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 47, 82. (21 November, 13 December)

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 68 (5 December)

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 121. (5 January)

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 110. (28 December)

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 72. (9 December)

pattern was repeated again with William Temple's younger brother Robert, as Boswell related:

I have unluckily let myself too much down by my extreme jocularly before him, so that when I want to assume any superiority over him, the little dog immediately rebels and cries, "Come, come, James, you are wanting to be the Great Man. But it won't do." Being *the Great Man* has been quite our cant word for some time... I wish I had kept him all along at a due distance, for too much familiarity, especially with those much younger than ourselves, is always attended with disagreeable circumstances. I really find this is what I am most apt to fall into; and as it often makes me look little and so gives me pain, I must guard against it.¹⁹⁹

As always, Boswell chastised himself for a failure to show reserve in conversation, and noted how it harmed his character and must be guarded against. It is clear through his repeated admonishments to himself that Boswell considered an overly-free tongue to be anathema to manliness, and subscribed to the distinctly English definition of taciturn manliness in conversation; Boswell associated rattling with his boyhood, and this was the failing that he resolved most often to correct in his attempt to achieve manhood.

Boswell's worldview, as previously discussed, was one that was shaped by nationalism, and this manifested itself in Boswell's approach to manliness. Boswell's approach to national identity was his constructed English/Scottish dichotomy, and this served as his main heuristic tool in considerations of how he was to affect his own transition to manhood. Boswell characterized his manly and polite ideal as distinctly English, and cast traits that he considered genteel as English in nature. As such, Boswell struck upon a simple formula for success: emulation of, and exposure to, Englishman. The corollary of this pro-English prescription for politeness was a condemnation of Scottishness and a characterization of Scottishness as intrinsically – and purposely –

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 298. (9 July)

impolite and unmanly, and an obstacle to Boswell's progress that was to be avoided. Boswell believed rattling to be his biggest failing and something he wished to leave behind as a relic of his boyhood, and latched onto the stereotype of English taciturnity in order to remedy this character flaw. Boswell's approach to manliness was shaped by his beliefs about national identity – he believed in innate Scottish and English national character, which he held were inherently unmanly and inherently polite, respectively. Nationalism was the ideological lens through which Boswell viewed himself and those around him, and this had a determining effect on how he perceived, and strove for, polite manliness throughout his time in London.

Chapter 3: “Quite a place to my mind”: Space and Topography in Boswell’s Journal

The third critical aspect of Boswell’s quest to refashion himself was space; while Englishness and politeness were critical in affecting his transition to manhood, Boswell also placed a great degree of importance (and spent time musing) upon space and topography in London, and how this could further shape his character. As Derek Gregory writes, “We routinely make sense of places, spaces and landscapes in our every day lives—in different ways and for different purposes—and these ‘popular geographies’ are as important to the conduct of social life as are our understanding of (say) biography and history.”²⁰⁰ This was true for Boswell, who considered space important to his project in a number of ways. He made sense of space in a way that suited and furthered his purpose of transforming himself into a London gentleman. Boswell considered space and topography to be an important part of posturing himself as the gentleman he wished to become. He treated space as one of the most convincing and effective benchmarks when measuring his progress toward his goal, as gaining access to “genteel” spaces was treated as indicative of his success. Boswell also associated spaces with specific character traits that he wished to acquire, and spent time in these spaces as a way of affecting change in his personality.

Boswell was convinced that London had everything he needed to reshape himself into the man he wished to be, and he treated the city as one of the most significant elements in his transformation. His feelings for London were immediate and overwhelming, as he recounted in regards to his arrival: “When we came upon Highgate Hill and had a view of London I was all life and joy. I repeated Cato’s soliloquy on the

²⁰⁰ Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1994), 11.

immortality of the soul, and my soul bounded forth a certain prospect of happy futurity... I gave three huzzas, and we went briskly in.”²⁰¹ Frederick Pottle asserts that Boswell’s love of London stemmed from the promise of self-fashioning that it facilitated: “In London he is able to change his identity... This is one of the great lessons of London. That is why Boswell is enamoured of the crowd and the general hustling business of life, in which the individual citizen can lose and find himself a thousand times.”²⁰² Boswell repeatedly stated his belief in London’s positive impact on his character,²⁰³ even relating his alarm at the effect not being immediate.²⁰⁴ It was not simply a one-way relationship, however; Boswell also reflexively constructed his love of the city as demonstrative of his own genteel demeanour: London was a space only a gentleman could appreciate. As he wrote on December 5, only men like himself and Addison could truly appreciate London just by existing within it, and become better because of it:

In reality, a person of small fortune who has only the common views of life and would just be as well as anybody else, cannot like London. But a person of imagination and feeling, such as the Spectator finely describes, can have the most lively enjoyment from the sight of external objects without regard to property at all. London is undoubtedly a place where men and manners may be seen to the greatest advantage. The liberty and the whim that reigns there occasions a variety of perfect and curious characters. Then the immense crowd and hurry and bustle of business and diversion, the great number of public places of entertainment, the noble churches and the superb buildings of different kinds, agitate, amuse, and elevate the mind. Besides, the satisfaction of pursuing whatever plan is most agreeable, without being known or looked at, is very great. Here a young man of curiosity and observation may have a sufficient fund of present entertainment, and may lay up ideas to employ his mind in age.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 44.

²⁰² Dan Ackroyd, in Boswell, *London Journal*, xv.

²⁰³ As quoted earlier, Boswell wrote on December 13: “I feel a surprising change to the better on myself since I came to London. I am an independent man. I think myself as good as anybody, and I act entirely on my own principles. Formerly I was directed by others... But now I keep my own counsel, I follow the dictates of my own good sense.” See Boswell, *London Journal*, 82.

²⁰⁴ Wrote Boswell on November 20: “Only I had a kind of uneasiness from feeling no amazing different between my existence now and at Edinburgh.” See Boswell, *London Journal*, 45. Boswell quickly got over this feeling, however; see the entry for November 21, page 47.

²⁰⁵ Boswell, *London Journal*, 68, 69.

An early example of Boswell's belief in London's transformative nature is the unconscious juxtaposition Boswell makes between himself and his former flames from his 1760 trip to London. Upon first arriving in London, Boswell immediately sought out Sally Forrester, who had kept a dwelling on Southampton Street – a fashionable street closed to all but very privileged traffic,²⁰⁶ and then Jeany Wells, who had lived on Berwick Street, Soho, an area of London in such high demand that houses never remained vacant for long, most often leased to sublet at a profit on the ever-increasing rental value.²⁰⁷ As Boswell related, both women had met similar fates; trying to present themselves as genteel and maintaining such fashionable residences drove both into debt, “ruined [them] with extravagance”, and led to their subsequent disappearances.²⁰⁸ Boswell marvelled at London's ability to chew people up and spit them out; “Good heaven, thought I, what an amazing change in two years! I saw in the year 1760 these young ladies in all the glow of beauty and admiration; and how they are utterly erased or worse.”²⁰⁹ However, Boswell could still conclude this journal entry with his previously-mentioned assertion that being in London had already had an overwhelmingly positive impact on his character, which left him calm and serene²¹⁰ (it is also worth noting that at this point, Boswell had only interacted with Scots; simply being in London had affected this change, another testament to Boswell's belief in its transformative power). Boswell

²⁰⁶ Hugh Philips, *Mid-Georgian London: A Topographical and Social Survey of Central and Western London about 1750*, (London: Collins, 1964), 136-137.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁰⁸ Boswell, *London Journal*, 46-47. (19 November)

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ As previously quoted, Boswell wrote: “Since I came up [three days ago], I have begun to acquire a composed genteel character very different from a rattling uncultivated one which for some time past I have been fond of. I have discovered that we may be in some degree whatever character we choose. Besides, practice forms a man to anything. I was now happy to find myself cool, easy, and serene.” See Boswell, *London Journal*, 47. (19 November)

was not in the least bit concerned about meeting a similar fate, despite coming to London with the same express purpose as the two women: becoming one of London's gentfolk on limited means. Boswell's (apparently blind) optimism about his own situation and his reflections on his former flames would foreshadow his own experience in London. He would soon be faced with the same problem that had condemned the two ladies: having to strike a balance between his own finances and the topographical posturing necessary to project the image of a London gentleman.

Boswell's commentary on getting settled in London sets up the way he viewed the city – and his relationship with it – throughout his *Journal*. For his journey south, and his first night in the metropolis, Boswell had received from West Digges the names of the best houses on the road to stop at, as well as a good inn in London itself – the Black Lion.

²¹¹ However, Boswell's first action in London was to find more genteel – and more permanent – lodgings, and as Boswell wrote; “I immediately went to my friend Douglas's, surgeon in Pall Mall... where I was cordially received.”²¹² Pall Mall is, and was especially at the time of Boswell's *Journal*, a fashionable street, and had been such since the migrations caused by the Great Fire of 1666; it was also notable for facing St. James's Park and the Royal Palace of Whitehall.²¹³ Boswell was incredibly pleased to inhabit this space; he wrote upon waking up after his first night there that “I got up well and enjoyed my good situation. I had a handsome dining-room and bed-chamber, just in Pall Mall, the finest part of town.”²¹⁴ This would be the pattern of Boswell's relationship with space in London throughout his time in the city: he sought out access to London's finest environs (always making note of how genteel they are), and commented on how the

²¹¹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 44. (19 November)

²¹² *Ibid.*, 45. (19 November)

²¹³ Philips, 52.

²¹⁴ Boswell, *London Journal*, 45. (19 November)

gaining of such access buoys his spirits and, ultimately, furthers his quest to better himself, which he would go into greater detail about later.

The episode that best illustrated the connection, in Boswell's mind, between the idealized gentlemanly image he wished to achieve/project and space and topography in London was his search for suitable lodgings upon his arrival. Boswell wasted no time on this front; in his first week in London, he estimated that he saw fifty potential lodgings, and worried that none would suit his purpose.²¹⁵ However, he finally settled on a rental on Downing Street, as he recorded on November 26:

At last I fixed in Downing Street, Westminster. I took a lodging up two pair of stairs with the use of a handsome parlour all the forenoon, for which I agreed to pay forty guineas a year... The street was a genteel street, within a few steps of the Parade; near the House of Commons, and very healthful.²¹⁶

Downing Street was perfect for Boswell's purposes: it was suitably posh (being the very street upon which the Prime Minister makes his residence), and, as will be illustrated in the map, within walking distance of his genteel friends and patrons. It was also very near St. James's Park, which was at the time, the "most colourful" of all the public parks,²¹⁷ and was *the* place for London's notables to visit, in order to see and be seen.²¹⁸ This general attitude toward St. James's Park was descriptive of Boswell's mentality toward London as a whole, as demonstrated when examining Boswell's choice in lodgings; Downing Street was perfect not just because it was conveniently located, but because it would reflect well on Boswell to be seen there. Boswell's reflections on this London home illustrated just how important he considered this aspect of genteel posturing.

²¹⁵ Wrote Boswell on Friday 26 November 1762: "I was much diffculted about lodgings. A variety I am sure I saw, I dare say fifty." See Boswell, *London Journal*, 50.

²¹⁶ Boswell, *London Journal*, 50. (26 November)

²¹⁷ Liza Picard, *Dr. Johnson's London* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 36-37.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

After only ten days in Downing Street, Boswell struggled with the question of just how important this topographical posturing was in constructing himself as a gentleman. Fearing that he had overstepped his means, he considered the relative importance of his lodgings when compared to other means of presenting himself, and went as far as informing his landlord he would be leaving:

I thought my present lodgings too dear, and therefore looked about and found a place in Crown Street, Westminster, an obscure street but pretty lodgings at only £22 a year. Much did I ruminate with regard to lodgings. Sometimes I considered that a fine lodging denoted a man of great fashion, but then I thought that few people would see it and therefore the expense would be hid, whereas my business was to make as much show as I could with my small allowance. I thought that an elegant place to come home to was very agreeable and would inspire me with ideas of my own dignity; but then I thought it would be hard if I had not a proportionable show in other things, and that it was better to come gradually to a fine place than from a fine to a worse. I therefore resolved to take the Crown Street place, and told my present landlord that I intended to leave him.²¹⁹

This illustrates just how important topographical posturing was in Boswell's ideal of a London gentleman. For Boswell, his *only* choices were between ostentatious or obscure lodgings – there was simply no middle ground. Either his lodgings would reflect well on him as a gentleman, or they would not reflect on him at all, because they would be hidden. Boswell was acutely aware that an important aspect of being a gentleman was posturing oneself as such, and there were many different facets of this posturing; but was posturing in regards to his lodgings worth sacrificing in favour of other aspects? Clearly, no – Boswell was only willing to sacrifice his lodgings if none were aware of what he had done, so closely tied were notions of gentility and space in his mind. He even explicitly laughed off this absurd notion of his in early March, when he wrote: “But then I considered that I wanted money. I then thought of having obscure lodgings, and actually

²¹⁹ Boswell, *London Journal*, 58. (30 November)

looked up and down the bottom of Holborn and towards Fleet Ditch for an out-of-the-way place. How very absurd are such conceits!”²²⁰

Luckily for Boswell, he ended up not having to make the choice, since his landlord, so enamoured with Boswell (as he tells it, anyway²²¹), allowed him to remain in his genteel lodgings at the same price as the obscure Crown Street lodgings. This was a great coup for Boswell, as it served as a microcosm of his entire quest in London – gaining access to genteel spaces and thus being seen as a gentleman, in spite of his limited financial means. Boswell’s final reflection on his quest for genteel lodgings came on November 30, when he mused:

I thought my seeking a lodging was like seeking a wife. Sometimes I aimed at one of two guineas a week, like a rich lady of quality. Sometimes at one guinea, like a knight’s daughter; and at last fixed on £22 a year, like the daughter of a good gentleman of moderate fortune. Now when fixed, I felt very comfortable, having got rid of the inconstant roving disposition of a bachelor as to lodging. However, I hope my choice of a wife will be more elegant.²²²

Here, Boswell demonstrated again his belief that topography was just as important to a London gentleman as the selection of a spouse: both would reflect, obviously, the gentleman’s taste and means, for better or for worse.

Boswell also expounded the importance of his lodgings in his equation of mastery of the space with the self-mastery that he desired, marvelling at his control and noting how impressed with himself he was:

²²⁰ Ibid., 214. (12 March)

²²¹ Wrote Boswell on Tuesday 30 November 1762: Boswell’s landlord said, “...that as I was agreeable to the family, he begged I would stay, and he would let me have my three rooms for £30. I thanked him for his good opinion of me, but told him economy at present was my object, although I was very happy in his house; and that I could not ask him to let me have three rooms in a genteel street as cheap as two in an obscure one. He paused a while and then told me that I should have them at the same price. He only begged that I would not mention it, as he certainly let them below value. I therefore struck a bargain and settled myself for a year.” See Boswell, *London Journal*, 59.

²²² Boswell, *London Journal*, 59. (30 November)

I order any little alterations that I wish. For instance, there was no communication between my dining-room and bedchamber. I ordered a door to be struck out, which was instantly done. I ordered some large breakfast cups and a carpet to my bedchamber and a bureau to my dining-room. It is inconceivable with what attention and spirit I manage all my concerns.²²³

However, this is an anomalous example: typically, simply existing within a space was enough for Boswell's project. Even when Boswell left Downing Street and moved in with his friend Temple in his rooms at the Inner Temple a few months later, he wrote to Johnston: "My Dear friend you can scarcely imagine how happy I am at present. The Temple is a Residence worthy of an Addison or a genuine Spectator."²²⁴ Boswell was still mindful of – and delighted by – the perceived gentility of his residence. It is clear that for Boswell, his own space and topographical posturing were inextricably linked to his posturing and his ideal of a London gentleman.

Greater insight into the significance of Boswell accessing genteel spaces – and how this affirmed and advanced his project of self-fashioning – can be gained if these spaces are understood as Foucaultian "heterotopias", essentially, places of physical and mental "otherness" that serve a specific purpose. For Boswell, this purpose was to validate his own status as a London gentleman. Foucault's fifth and sixth principles of heterotopias are particularly useful in regards to Boswell's quest to penetrate these spaces:

Fifth principle. Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place... To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures.²²⁵

²²³ Boswell, *London Journal*, 81. (12 December)

²²⁴ Boswell & Johnston, 96.

²²⁵ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967), Heterotopias." Jay Miskowiec, trans. *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*. October, 1984, 8.

Sixth Principle. [T]heir role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation.²²⁶

These are apt descriptions of the genteel spaces that Boswell reflected upon in his *Journal* – and why he felt they reflected on him, as well, and buoyed his spirits and confidence throughout his time in London. Spaces such as Northumberland House, the Beefsteak Club, and countless other, smaller, spaces were important to Boswell because they existed separate from the rest of London – only gentlefolk were allowed within them. Thus, if Boswell could gain access to these spaces, it demonstrated his own gentility.

Boswell's quest to gain access to Northumberland House is the most significant genteel heterotopia in his *Journal*, and the example which best embodies Foucault's sixth principle. The largest and most ostentatious private residence in London, Northumberland House was located at Charing Cross, near the Strand – a juncture through which funnelled such a large proportion of London's traffic that Samuel Johnson observed of it that he had witnessed "the whole tide of human existence" passing through as he watched.²²⁷ In this, Northumberland House's location – in what seemed to be the eye of the storm of London's chaotic press of humanity – made it an apt manifestation of Foucault's principles. Juxtaposed with a crossing through which all of London could (and some believed, did) pass through on a daily basis, Northumberland House was, as with Foucault's Fifth Principle, not accessible to the general public despite their proximity: "To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures",²²⁸ in this case,

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Picard, 49; Boswell, *Life of Dr. Johnson*, 2:337.

²²⁸ Foucault, 8.

demonstrating one's status as one of London's gentlefolk. Northumberland House was a refuge of polite gentility situated next to the unrivalled chaos and crush of one of London's busiest crossings, creating, as in Foucault's Sixth Principle, "a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled."²²⁹ Boswell's attraction to Northumberland House is understandable; here was a space as heterotypic as it was genteel, and by securing entry into Northumberland House, Boswell would set himself apart from London's commoners and amongst the genteel elite.

Upon arriving in London, Boswell had called on Northumberland House twice, seeking entry, but was turned away (again, heterotopias requiring "certain permissions" and "certain gestures"). However, Boswell did eventually gain entrance, and related his elation: "I now received a card of invitation to the rout on Tuesday the 7. This raised my spirits, gave me notions of my consequence, and filled me with grandeur."²³⁰ Boswell was explicit in stating that the invitation bolstered his image of himself, as well as improving his mood, and this trend continued. After two visits to Northumberland House, Boswell related that the Duchess informed him that "I gave positive orders that you should be admitted whenever you called," which Boswell immediately described as putting him "into the finest humour."²³¹ Boswell was doubly "exulted" when he was initially refused entry on December 10 after being told nobody was home by the porter – until the porter found out Boswell's name, which gained him entry, and a sitting with the Duchess.²³² Boswell's unrestricted access to one of London's most genteel heterotopias makes him feel vindicated – clearly, his quest to become a gentleman is succeeding, for the space is

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Boswell, *London Journal*, 65. (2 December)

²³¹ Ibid., 71. (7 December)

²³² Ibid., 73. (10 December)

one only gentleman may occupy – and Boswell has complete access to it whenever he likes, which bolsters his spirits as well as his self-image. Boswell reaffirmed the nobility and genteel nature of the Northumberlands (and their space) as a way to further affirm his success: “This is indeed a noble family in every respect. They live in a most princely manner, perfectly suitable to their high rank.”²³³ Here, Boswell demonstrated his belief in the connection between space and character traits he wished to acquire, as the Northumberlands’ “princely” accommodations were “perfectly suitable” to their rank and nobility. For Boswell, it was only fitting that those of genteel demeanour exist in genteel spaces – and this was a point he made after he had already made clear that he could access this space whenever he pleased.

Boswell’s entry to the Beefsteak Club follows a similar pattern, and led to further positive self-assessments of his mood and genteel character. Like Northumberland House, this space was isolated, but still penetrable, and it embodied the character traits Boswell best hoped to acquire, as it was famous for being a space which was crowded nightly with gentlemen, and which only consisted of “polite scholars of wit.”²³⁴ However, as with heterotypic spaces, entry could not be gained without special permission and “rites of purification.”²³⁵ In this case, Boswell’s patron, Lord Eglinton, left Boswell to wait while he entered the closed space himself and obtained from its members permission for Boswell to enter.²³⁶ Boswell was quick to describe the makeup of the Beefsteak Club; specifically, how it was a very “mixed society” (and Pottle agrees, noting the presence of the Earl of Sandwich and John Wilkes, whom Sandwich would famously turn on and

²³³ Ibid., 71. (7 December)

²³⁴ Philips, 146.

²³⁵ Foucault, 8.

²³⁶ Boswell, *London Journal*, 51. (27 November)

impeach²³⁷), implying that gentility and wit were the only real common ground of its members – making his entry even more significant.²³⁸ After this, Boswell related his attempt to convince Eglinton of his newly-acquired wisdom, as (he wrote): “He Little knew the experience I had got and the notions and the composure that I had obtained by reflection.”²³⁹ Here again, Boswell juxtaposed his penetration of a genteel space with notions of his own gentlemanliness, and he ultimately concluded his reflection on the evening with the observation that he “was now all gentle felicity”, as well as noting (as a seeming afterthought) that even his attire was genteel, commenting on his wearing of a “genteel violet-coloured frock suit.”²⁴⁰ Entrance to the heterotypic Beefsteak Club led Boswell to a journal entry – significantly, one of his longest – that stressed his betterment from his past self and his felicitous demeanour; access to this heterotopia gave Boswell positive notions of progress in his quest to refashion himself.

This pattern repeated itself a number of times throughout Boswell’s stay in London. Upon being invited to the Gould’s (Nathaniel and Elizabeth – distant relatives that Boswell had not met before), Boswell related that: “I came away in fine spirits at having got so agreeable a home.”²⁴¹ On visiting Ranelagh Gardens (a pleasure garden designed to outdo Vauxhall, and charging significantly more for entry – summed up by Liza Picard as “more select”²⁴²); another genteelly heterotypic space with Lord Eglinton, Boswell commented: “I felt a glow of delight at entering again that elegant place. This is an entertainment quite peculiar to London. The noble Rotunda all surrounded with boxes to sit in and such a profusion of well-dressed people walking round is very fine. My

²³⁷ Pottle, in Boswell, *London Journal*, 52. (27 November)

²³⁸ Boswell, *London Journal*, 52. (27 November)

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 64. (2 December)

²⁴² Picard, 247.

spirits were now better.”²⁴³ Boswell’s gonorrhoea-dampened spirits were similarly buoyed in late January, when the famous actor David Garrick informed him that he could visit whenever he pleased: “he asked me to come whenever I could. I rejoiced. This is really establishing myself in a charming place. I shall there see all the men of genius of the age. Let me indulge the pleasing prospect of the many happy hours which I shall pass there when I am again blessed with health.”²⁴⁴ These smaller examples further illustrate that Boswell felt elated when he was welcomed into genteel spaces; even when his morale was low, gaining access to these heterotopias reinforced his self-assurance.

Boswell’s first tryst with the actress Louisa served as another example of how Boswell’s attitudes toward space affected his behaviour and his project of self-fashioning. Unable to consummate their relationship at either of their residences, Boswell struck upon the Black Lion Inn, where he had stayed upon his arrival in London.²⁴⁵ As noted earlier, this was a space that Boswell knew as genteel, as befitted the climax (literally and figuratively) of a courtship which Boswell had considered to be the height of genteel manliness. This space had been recommended to Boswell by one of the Englishmen he strove to emulate, West Digges, and Boswell made this explicit in registering at the inn under the name “Mr. Digges,” again associating space with his desire to be like the Englishmen he idolized.²⁴⁶ It is also worth noting that this space was specifically chosen for being outside of Boswell’s regular stomping grounds, to avoid causing any scandal. Boswell removed himself from the space important to his project of self-fashioning so as not to jeopardize it, and this consideration of topography and gentility was one that permeated Boswell’s musings on his time in London.

²⁴³ Boswell, *London Journal*, 256. (11 May)

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 163. (21 January)

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 119. (4 January)

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 127. (12 January)

Even a perfunctory reading of the *Journal* reveals that to Boswell, topography and his imagined ideal of a London gentleman are intrinsically linked. He was unwaveringly meticulous about specifying the exact locations of his daily sojourns; the reader (himself, and Johnston) needed to know not just what Boswell was doing, but exactly *where* he was doing it. Boswell's attention to topographic detail creates a text in which the interrelations between gentility and topography can be examined - and even mapped. While at this point, only a comprehensive map of Boswell's first month has been created,²⁴⁷ it is very indicative of Boswell's London throughout his time there – Boswell's pattern of movements and visitations remain virtually unchanged and anchored in the same spaces throughout the entire period, excepting in the last months when Boswell's dwelling shifted to the Inner Temple, and he began to spend time with Dr Samuel Johnson. Boswell's last month in London is the only exception to this pattern of movement/habitation, and this was only after Boswell had given up on his quest to make a man of himself in London and had resigned himself to studying law in Holland. This demonstrates the importance of topography and space to Boswell's project: when he was engaged in his quest to refashion himself into a London gentleman, he was dealing with a very specific "London"; and when he ultimately abandoned the quest, he abandoned that particular "London" for another.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ The map was created for the 35th Annual Conference of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, as part of the presentation "Gentlemen and Topography in Boswell's *London Journal*: 1762-1763," November 2009, and can be explored electronically at <http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/map-dev.php?zoomifyImagePath=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/Horwood/&zoomifyX=0.0204698672335252&zoomifyY=0.101923581235251&zoomifyZoom=18.5805583686986¤tXML=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/xml/Boswell-1762-11-12.xml> by selecting File > Folder > Boswell in London > November-December, 1762. Note "show labels" must be turned on, and that darker-red markers on the map indicate repeated visits to a certain spot; labels may also be clicked on to list the dates that a specific space was visited by Boswell.

George Rude, *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971), 40-41.

²⁴⁸ Unlike in the previous months, Boswell's activities are no longer contained almost entirely in Westminster. Not only does he relocate to the Inner Temple by moving in with his friend William Johnson



Figure 1: Boswell's "London" (Darker circles indicate repeated visits)

Mapping Boswell's *Journal* is most immediately helpful because it shows the reader what, in particular, constituted "London" for James Boswell during his quest to refashion himself.²⁴⁹ Boswell's "London" was really only a fraction – perhaps an eighth – of London's total area, confined almost entirely in Westminster. This is important to note, as it illustrates that it was a very specific "London" that Boswell had in mind, and is

Temple, he begins to frequent a number of new spaces, most commonly the Mitre Tavern (July 1st, 6th, 14th), the Turk's Head Coffee House (July 22nd, 28th, 30th, August 1st and 3rd), and number of scattered and isolated other establishments. His only notable incursions back into his old spaces are social visits to Dempster's (July 1st and daily from 15th-18th).

²⁴⁹ Figure 1. Kurt Krueger, "Map of Boswell's London Journal, November-December 1762." *Grub Street Project*. Allison Muri, ed. <http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/map-dev.php?zoomifyImagePath=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/Horwood/&zoomifyX=0.111107147025305&zoomifyY=-0.0763320476564493&zoomifyZoom=4.09919559871629¤tXML=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/xml/Boswell-1762-11-12.xml>

referring to, throughout his *Journal* and when discussing his attempts to refashion himself. The confines of Boswell's London, while noticeable, are not at all surprising; Westminster had always contained the neighbourhoods of London's aristocracy, initially in the Covent Garden area, and pushing further westward throughout the eighteenth century.²⁵⁰ Westminster was also a far more homogenous sector of London than the rest of the city; it contained, for the most part, London's wealthier citizenry – unlike elsewhere, where slums ubiquitously existed alongside more respectable streets, Westminster's poor and criminal elements, while still extant, largely confined themselves to the medieval streets around the Abbey and Charing Cross, through which most of London's East-West traffic passed.²⁵¹ As such, Boswell's London was what he hoped to shape himself into: genteel, leisured, wealthy, and (comparatively) untroubled. Westminster was Boswell's ideal personality writ large.

²⁵⁰ George Rude, *Hanoverian London: 1714-1808*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971), 40-41.

²⁵¹ Picard, 15.



Figure 2: Boswell in Westminster

Mapping Boswell's *Journal* shows that Boswell's London was, for the most part, bounded by the homes of his primary friends/patrons, creating a wedge-shaped section of Westminster between his own lodgings on Downing Street, Dempster's, Eglinton's, Queensbury House, Macfarlane's, Sheridan's, Douglas', Coutt's (less prominent in the first month, but increasingly important afterwards) and the Covent Garden Theatre. The majority of Boswell's sojourns took him to these specific locations, or to locations (more or less) within his wedge of Westminster.²⁵² Without a map such as this, it would be far

²⁵²Figure 2. Krueger, *Grub Street Project*. <http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/map-dev.php?zoomifyImagePath=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/Horwood/&zoomifyX=0.225507162463644&zoomifyY=-0.0137779909780081&zoomifyZoom=7.46710968392271¤tXML=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/xml/Boswell-1762-11-12.xml>

less apparent that Boswell had carved out such a specific (and readily apparent) niche of London as his own. It is also significant that the boundaries of Boswell's London, and the spaces that he most commonly visits within them (the only exception being Sheridan's and Covent Garden Theater) are Scottish – and this is a trend that continued throughout his *Journal*, with close to three-quarters of the spaces he visits being Scottish spaces (usually the homes of friends and patrons). The “London” in which Boswell believes he is constructing a new, idealized self, is a London that consists mostly of Scottish spaces (the exact opposite of what Boswell had counselled himself against, as shown in previous chapters). Yet, despite Boswell's overly-Scottish “London”, he never lost his faith in the city's ability to refashion his personality – London's transformative nature seems to override the fact that Boswell was actually moving through, and existing in, Scottish spaces; London itself trumped the Scottish spaces in which Boswell regularly found himself.

Boswell's very specific topographical locus also creates interesting implications for examining his movements outside of his typical area, as well as intrusions into “his” London. For example, Boswell was incredibly vexed by the arrival of his distant relatives, the Kellies, as previously discussed, partly because they “hurt his grand ideas of London.”²⁵³ A simple reading of the text makes it clear enough that Boswell was upset because his family's appearance was seen as an invasion of “his” city that challenged his perceptions of London and his project of self-construction. However, looking at the map of the *Journal*, Boswell's feelings of violation are made more apparent. It is not just that

²⁵³ Wrote Boswell: “This afternoon I was surprised with the arrival of Lady Betty Macfarlane, Lady Anne Erskine, Captain Erskine, and Miss Dempster, who were come to the Red Lion Inn at Charing Cross... To tell the plain truth, I was vexed at their coming. For to see just the plain *hamely* Fife family hurt my grand ideas of London. Besides, I was now upon a plan of studying polite reserved behaviour, which is the only way to keep up dignity of character.” See Boswell, *London Journal*, 61.

his relatives are in *London*; they have penetrated the very heart of *his* London, the Red Lion Inn existing almost exactly in the centre of Boswell's Westminster wedge.²⁵⁴ As discussed, Boswell had very specific regular stomping grounds, in which a very specific "London" was shaping a very specific set of personality traits; and it was into this constructed (and bounded) realm that these jarring reminders of his past self inserted themselves. Of everywhere in London they could have possibly stayed – Boswell himself, as an out-of-towner, stayed at the Black Lion Inn²⁵⁵ in the Old City on his first nights, it being the only assuredly-genteel inn that he knew of²⁵⁶ – they chose to stay in the nexus of the part of London Boswell sees as his own – and as necessary for his self-redefinition. With the map, Boswell's vexation becomes even more understandable.

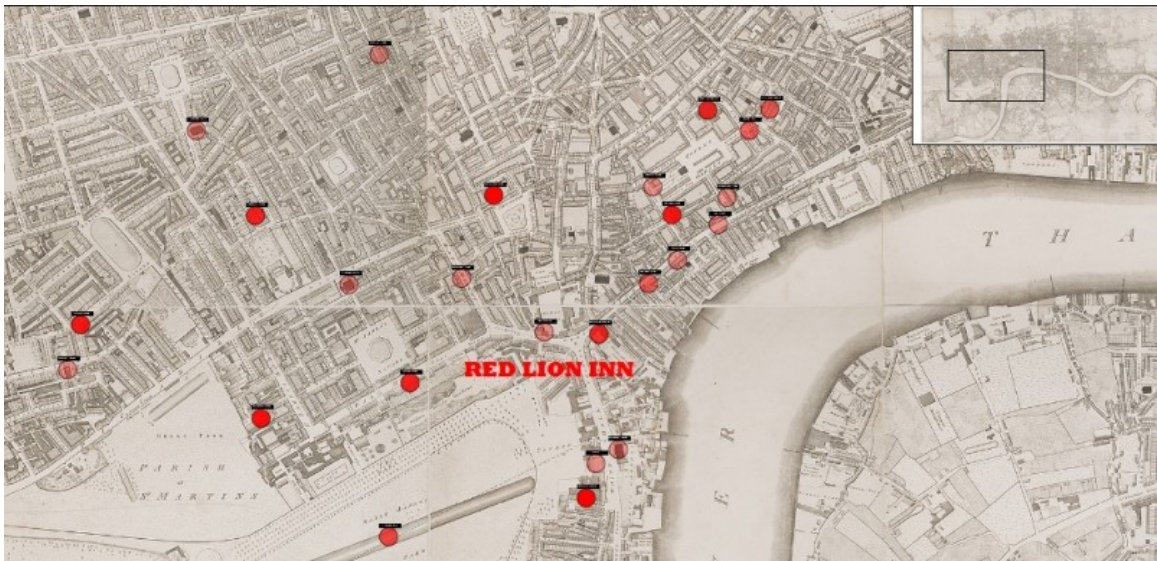


Figure 3: The Red Lion Inn

²⁵⁴ Figure 3. Krueger, *Grub Street Project*, <http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/map-dev.php?zoomifyImagePath=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/Horwood/&zoomifyX=0.217678531737901&zoomifyY=-0.024882994977674&zoomifyZoom=22.2966700424383¤tXML=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/xml/Boswell-1762-11-12.xml>

²⁵⁵ <http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/map-dev.php?zoomifyImagePath=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/Horwood/&zoomifyX=0.0658639712289034&zoomifyY=0.0987721265133571&zoomifyZoom=46.234375¤tXML=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/xml/Boswell-1762-11-12.xml>

²⁵⁶ Boswell had the Inn recommended to him by West Digges before setting out. See Boswell, *London Journal*, 44. (19 November)



Figure 4: The Black Lion Inn

An interesting deviation from Boswell's specific "London" is his favourite haunt, Child's Coffee House, which he visited every Sunday; it is immediately apparent on the map how out-of-the-way Child's is in regards to Boswell's "London".²⁵⁷ In eighteenth-century London, coffee houses functioned as social centres where "Men interested in the same things, whether business, politics, or pleasure, tended to converge on the same establishment,"²⁵⁸ and Child's was widely-known as *the* coffee house for London's doctor's, being located just south of the College of Physicians.²⁵⁹ Boswell's frequenting of Child's is notable for three reasons; first, it was where Boswell went for respite from

²⁵⁷ Figure 4. Krueger, *Grub Street Project*, <http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/map-dev.php?zoomifyImagePath=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/Horwood/&zoomifyX=0.0204698672335252&zoomifyY=0.101923581235251&zoomifyZoom=18.5805583686986¤tXML=http://grubstreetproject.net/maps/xml/Boswell-1762-11-12.xml>

²⁵⁸ Picard, 199.

²⁵⁹ Pottle, in Boswell, *London Journal*, 23-24.

his quest to insinuate himself with London's elite: he does not seek to make contacts, records no names, and makes no real friends despite engaging in friendly conversation. In his *Journal*, Boswell illustrated his desire to simply observe and experience more of London through the conduit of Child's, such as when he resolved to record snippets of conversations he overhears in the coffee house, creating for himself small snapshots of London's citizenry, souvenirs of the city.²⁶⁰ Secondly, Child's is important to Boswell because Addison had recommended it in the first issue of the *Spectator*; as previously discussed, Boswell explicitly sought to emulate Addison toward achieving his distinctly English brand of manhood. This continued in relation to Child's: Boswell sought to further emulate Addison by occupying the same spaces, which gave him grand notions of himself: "The Spectator mentions his being seen at Child's, which makes me have an affection for it. I think myself like him, and am serenely happy there."²⁶¹ Thirdly, and in keeping with Boswell's valuing of genteel heterotopias and the relationship between Westminster and Boswell's ideal personality, he also associated this specific space with character traits he wished to acquire: "It is quite a place to my mind; dusky, comfortable, and warm, with a society of citizens and physicians who talk politics very fully and are very sagacious and sometimes jocular."²⁶² Here, as well, Boswell could demonstrate his mastery of polite, manly conversation, going into great detail about his own great wit in political discussions with the doctors.²⁶³ Child's was, essentially, a microcosm for Boswell's entire quest in London; here, he could experience London, expose himself to characteristics he hoped to adopt, emulate the Englishmen he idolized, and demonstrate his own manliness.

²⁶⁰ Boswell, *London Journal*, 74. (11 December)

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 76. (11 December)

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 74. (11 December)

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 74-76. (11 December)



Figure 5: Child's Coffee House

Child's is a fitting example of just how important Boswell considered space and topography to be in his quest to refashion himself. It also serves to illustrate how mapping his movements throughout London can engender investigation that further fleshes out this relationship between space and character. In his quest for lodgings, Boswell demonstrated his understanding of the importance of topography in gentlemanly posturing. Northumberland House and similar spaces served as heterotypic sites of genteel "otherness", the penetration of which Boswell used to affirm his own progress. From Westminster as a whole – Boswell's "London" – to Child's Coffee House, Boswell associated spaces with character traits he desired, which led to Boswell developing a very specific territory and pattern of movements that reflected the man he wished to become. Space, in terms of the amount of reflecting Boswell did on it and how it affected his

behaviour throughout his time in London, was just as important to his process of self-fashioning as Englishness or polite manliness.

Conclusion

Boswell's quest for identity in London would, in the end, be unsuccessful. As Newman characterised the *Journal* as "a depressing record of failures", Pottle likewise pointed to this failure when describing Boswell's ultimate capitulation to his father's will; giving up of his scheme to remain in London, and heading to Holland to study law: "Boswell had whirled into London in a post-chaise, cheering; he crawled into Utrecht in a canal boat, without huzzas. The campaign for making a new man out of James Boswell had got off to a very bad start."²⁶⁴ Boswell's father Alexander had written him in late May, illustrating a keen understanding – and complete disapproval – of Boswell's plan to refashion himself into a London gentleman, and put his finger on what had gone wrong in Boswell's project:

What you mean by becoming independent I am at a loss to conceive, for it would seem to be something very different from what anybody else would aim at. Your notion of independency seems to consist in contemning your relation and your native country, where and from you have a natural right to receive regard and friendship, and to live in dependence upon strangers in another country, where you have no title to notice, and from whom you have nothing to expect but fair words. They have their relations to provide, their political connections to keep up, and must look on one who comes from Scotland as an idle person to have no right to share their bounty; in the same way that we here would never think of bestowing anything upon a vaguing Englishman except a dinner or a supper.²⁶⁵

As much as Boswell had hoped to refashion himself into a refined London gentleman, it was not to be – although he never really gave up the goal over the course of the rest of his life. Boswell's ultimate failure, however, is not as disheartening for the historian as it was for Boswell himself; his attempts to refashion himself, and the paradigms he adopted still

²⁶⁴ Newman, 39; Pottle, *The Early Years*, 123.

²⁶⁵ Alexander Boswell to James Boswell, 30 May 1763, in Boswell, *London Journal*, 340.

offer a compelling look into the nature of identity, nationalism, masculinity, and space in his quest to reinvent himself.

Boswell's father Alexander had put his finger on the crux of the new identity Boswell was seeking: it was predicated on a worldview in which nationalism and character were deeply related, and nationalism became the ideological worldview or paradigm through which Boswell viewed the whole of his campaign. Struggling with his past character, Boswell looked to nationalism as the diagnosis of the problem, as the prescriptive solution, to his problem – and this took the form of a simple, if not simplistic, English/Scottish dichotomy that vilified his country of origin – as well as his countrymen – and glorified Englishness as the way to become a new man. This was a paradigm and prescription that, while simple, proved to be difficult to follow, and even with Boswell's belief in the malleability of identity and his frequent condemnations of Scottishness, he was unable to completely reject his Scottish heritage. Boswell's approach to nationalism was, on the whole, largely explicable in the framework – and reflexively, demonstrative of the effectiveness – of Constructivism, in that nationalism served as the lens through which he viewed himself, the people around him, and his prospects for success. Even if his primordial Scottish leanings ultimately prevented this from amounting to anything, they did have profound effects on his approach to masculinity, an important part of his project.

Manliness was Boswell's ultimate goal, and his approach was characteristic of the eighteenth century, in that it was a conception of masculinity that centered on politeness. Boswell's attempts to achieve the manliness he desired were profoundly coloured by his nationalist worldview, and his Scottish/English dichotomy dominated his approach to the

subject. His Scottish countrymen were characterized as anathema to polite manliness, while Englishmen were lauded as pinnacles of this character that were to be explicitly emulated as much as possible. This impacted Boswell's social behaviour in London, as well; he attempted to avoid Scots as much as was socially acceptable, and he sought out exposure to English company, which he felt improved him almost holistically. Boswell's approach to conversation throughout his time in London is most telling: he adopted the strictly English approach to silence and reserve in conversation as manly, and would repeatedly congratulate himself when he achieved this – but more often reprimanded himself when he failed in this regard.

Space served as the third critical aspect of Boswell's project to refashion himself. Boswell's belief in the city's ability to change him stemmed from its ability to expose him to the character he desired, whilst retreating from the Scots who held him back. Space was also an important means of Boswell's posturing; he needed to project the identity he hoped to achieve, and it was through the medium of space that he did this. As well, Boswell sought out spaces that he associated with specific (and English) character traits that he hoped to adopt for himself, absorbing the personality he desired by existing within the spaces that represented them. Most importantly, though, space became *the* yardstick by which Boswell would measure his success, as the gaining of access to genteel, English spaces – spaces that were not unlike the character he wished to be – convinced him of his success even as they helped him to change his personality in the way he desired.

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